

DOCTORAL THESIS

University Counsellors' Experiences of Working with Students who Procrastinate: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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**University Counsellors' Experiences of Working
with Students who Procrastinate: An Interpretative
Phenomenological Analysis**

by

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for the degree of PsychD Counselling Psychology*

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Abstract

Procrastination as problematic delay is a widely occurring phenomenon in modern society. It is particularly prevalent in academic settings where some students avoid or postpone their work in numerous ways. Over the last three decades, a substantial body of quantitative and some qualitative studies have been conducted, however, to date researchers are still unclear about what causes this problem and how it can be effectively helped. Working with procrastination is therefore considered an important issue for counselling psychologists, many of whom work in university student counselling services. The aim of this research was to conduct an inductive qualitative study to explore how university counsellors understand and work with students who present for help with procrastination. Ten volunteer participants were interviewed who mainly identified themselves as working integratively. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted and the results produced four master themes that highlighted firstly general challenges of working with students who procrastinate in university settings. Secondly, three distinct styles of procrastination were identified from these participants' accounts as "de-skilled", "anxious/fearful" and "conflictual". These indicated a need for tailored therapeutic approaches that seemed to be enabled by an integrative therapeutic stance. Overall, it may be concluded that procrastination as a presenting problem in academia is a heterogeneous phenomenon that requires adaptable therapeutic approaches for individual students' styles in relation to studying autonomously.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of Chapter One

This research explores the experiences of university counsellors working with students who procrastinate to produce findings of relevance to counselling psychologists. As an introduction to the thesis, this chapter will firstly offer an introduction to the practice of counselling psychology (CoP) and explore the relevance of a study on problem accounts of procrastination in relation to its therapeutic practice in the context of academic counselling. Secondly, the sociocultural context of university/academic settings and its influences and demands on student performance is considered with regards to procrastination being understood as problematic behaviour. Thirdly, this chapter identifies diverse psychological definitions for how “procrastination” is understood and illustrates the complexity inherent in this field as, to date, no clear unified understanding has been found in the extant psychological and therapeutic literatures. Finally, an overview of the forthcoming chapters of the thesis will conclude this introduction chapter.

1.2 Higher Education Counselling: Relevance to Counselling Psychology

CoP is a relatively new branch of the applied psychologies in the UK, acquiring its full professional status with the British Psychological Society (BPS) in 1992 (Woolfe, 2016). Whilst rooted in humanistic values (e.g. Rogers, 1957) it has nevertheless evolved into a discipline committed to exploring, recognising and integrating different

psychological traditions (BPS, 2005). The profession is thus distinguished by its inclusion and integration of a broad range of psychological perspectives (e.g. cognitive-behavioural, humanistic and psychodynamic) and in its critically evaluative stance to theory, research and practice (e.g. Division of Counselling Psychology [DCoP], 2001; Douglas, Woolfe, Strawbridge, Kasket, & Galbraith, 2016). Hence, CoP philosophy “considers no theoretical, epistemological or methodological approaches as superior” (Rizq, 2006, p.614). In practice, this mainly translates into a therapeutic approach that integrates varied psychological perspectives in a way that may be conducive to be sensitive to individual clients’ needs (Douglas et al., 2016).

Further, CoP’s stance seeks to understand variance and subjectivity as opposed to offering singular explanations for human experiences (McAteer, 2010). This phenomenological attentiveness goes beyond the counselling room as it also applies to other areas of the field, including research, as the BPS (2005) guidelines set out for CoP to:

“Develop models of practice and research which marry the scientific demand for rigorous empirical enquiry with a firm value base grounded in the primacy of the counselling or psychotherapeutic relationship” (BPS, 2005, p. 1).

The above quote points to CoP’s endeavour to couple two opposing paradigms: 1) a scientific model which forms theory that can be tested in further enquiry and 2) the humanistic ethos which values diversity across different perspectives and traditions (e.g. BPS, 2005; Douglas et al., 2016; Kasket, 2012; Rafalin, 2010). As the therapeutic contact between individuals offers a means of exploring, understanding and finding

meaning in unique experiences this meaning making is particularly valued in CoP (Strawbridge, 2016). In research, this collaborative relationship may translate into the use of qualitative methods that enable us to enter the world of another in ways that linear or causal measures cannot explain (Strawbridge, 2016). Conducting rigorous research, with interest in identifying diversities of individuals' experiences in their unique contexts, is thus of particular value in this field (Kasket & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011).

Douglas et al. (2016) note specific contexts where counselling psychologists work; while they are widely known to practice in the National Health Service (NHS) they are also increasingly being employed in other settings such as Higher Education (HE) counselling services, where there is a dearth of research on counsellors' role and potential contribution. In fact, academic counselling provision generally requires research attention due to these services being under increasing pressure to offer adaptable and effective short-term therapy to a diverse student population, as will be of crucial focus in this section.

In an effort to reduce discrimination and foster greater diversity across student profiles, over the past two decades, influences from disability and equality legislation have postulated that anyone, regardless of their background, have equal rights to access HE (Equality Act, 2010, as cited in Universities UK, 2015; Special Educational Needs & Disability Act 2001, Disability Discrimination Act 1995, both cited in Royal College of Psychiatrists [RCP], 2011). Consequently, institutions are both obligated to implement wide intake criteria as well as legally responsible to care for students in need (e.g. RCP, 2011). Following government agendas for greater diversity, the HE context has also seen a growth in student distress, as evidenced in Macaskill's (2012) cross-

sectional study on mental health in UK universities. To some extent, Macaskill (2012) attributes this enhanced distress to reductions in statutory student funding and increased tuition fees.

Statutory financial constraints have also impacted educational provision in that class sizes are increased and teaching hours reduced (Macaskill, 2012). Thus, there is an implicit pressure on students to learn quickly and independently within institutional expectations for autonomous academic performance. In Danchev's (2016) account on psychological counselling/psychotherapeutic work¹ in the academic setting, he recognises these institutional demands to influence negatively on students' wellbeing. Already these contextual pressures are also evident in Cooper's (2010) work that identifies students' vulnerability to academic distress and failure. Therefore, it is argued that experiences of being a university student are relevant to studies on procrastination as these individuals are obligated to regulate themselves autonomously. If student distress impedes studying abilities, Macaskill (2012) argues that it is in universities' interest to have appropriate support systems in place to help students achieve their full potential. Today, most UK institutions provide counselling for their students (e.g. Association for University and College Counselling [AUCC], 2010).

To date, a number of reports have been published to offer institutions guidelines regarding student mental health and counselling provision (e.g. AUCC, 2010; Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education [AMOSSHE], 2001; RCP, 2011; Universities UK, 2015). These publications acknowledge that, although most universities offer counselling, institutions' primary task is education rather than

¹ Forthwith referred to as either counselling, therapy or therapeutic work.

counselling provision. Yet, it seems widely accepted that HE is a well-utilised context for psychological treatment provision by young adults in the UK (e.g. Hallett, 2012; Hewitt & Wheeler, 2004; Kadambi, Audet, & Knish, 2010; Randall & Bewick, 2015; Rickinson, 1997; RCP, 2011; E. Smith, 2000; Universities UK, 2015). For instance, the RCP (2011) highlights that the NHS may be limited in offering timely services that accommodate students' timetables and the university calendar. Moreover, Hallett's (2012) account suggests that straightforward access to institutional services, compared with lengthier and referral-based routes to statutory treatment, renders HE a popular context for counselling provision among students. However, HE counselling services seem pressured, as their funding has not kept up with the growth in student numbers and demand (e.g. Macaskill, 2012). Consequently, these services seem both overstretched and expected to offer efficient treatment to a widening population over an average of four counselling sessions (RCP, 2011; Universities UK, 2015). Considering the high demand for academic counselling services, research activity in this field has been relatively low.

In a review commissioned by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), Connell, Cahill, Barkham, Gilbody and Madill (2006) have examined and mapped out research activity towards building an evidence-base for HE counselling effectiveness. Overall, they describe that "*the quality of the research as a whole is relatively low*" (Connell et al. 2006, p.32) as trending research repeatedly implement correlational designs that compare, often archived, student clients' pre-and post-counselling evaluation measures in studies which tend to omit adequate control group comparisons, and finally, wherefrom claims are made about treatment outcome. Hence, Connell et al. (2006) indicate that extant research closely resembles service

evaluation studies as opposed to forming a solid evidence-base for effective counselling. In response to these findings, Connell, Barkham and Mellor-Clark (2008) have conducted a subsequent study across several UK counselling services with the aim to further the HE treatment outcome research. Using pre- and post-counselling measures to investigate both clients and counsellors' perspectives, the findings indicate evidence for counselling effectiveness. Connell et al.'s (2008) argue that treatment is most effective with the problems of highest prevalence in HE, as evidenced in preceding reviews (AUCC, 2010; Connell et al., 2006), namely depression, anxiety, relationship issues and academic problems.

While HE counselling outcomes seem effective, the underlying therapeutic processes remain largely un-researched. Connell et al. (2006) attribute this dearth to the predominant trends that favour quantitative approaches in building an evidence-base for treatment, as investigations on therapeutic processes are less amenable to such methodologies (such as randomised controlled trials). To examine improvement from therapy, Olson and Claiborn (1990) have argued that the underlying therapeutic processes need understanding first. Cook (2000) adds that these processes may include counsellors' understanding aetiology of the presenting issues and the influences of these assumptions in their approach to treatment. Thus, research activity that explores university counsellors' experiences could offer useful insights into HE counselling.

Research on university counsellors' experiences has highlighted the need for further inquiry in HE counselling. While some studies acknowledge counsellors' positive accounts (Kadambi et al., 2010); the predominant narratives emphasise the professional tensions evoked by the HE context (e.g. Bond, 1992; Davies, 2000; Hallett, 2012;

Hewitt & Wheeler, 2004; Randall & Bewick, 2015; E. Smith, 2000). These accounts offer insight into the abovementioned contextual pressures from the practitioners' perspectives that highlight the, at times, stressful and ethically demanding circumstances inherent in their role. For instance, Hallett's (2012) introspective psychoanalytic account highlights the stressors of the work, which include offering high-paced yet effective treatment to a diverse population whilst also adhering to the context's primary educative mission. This interface between the counselling service and the institution's educative interest, at times, seems to evoke ethical tensions for university counsellors. Similarly, Davies (2000) argues that the two-way therapeutic dyad in HE seems cast into a triad or an even more complex relationship constellation. Hewitt and Wheeler's (2004) qualitative study elaborates on this notion by postulating that the intimacy of the therapeutic relationship seems compromised by the institution's predominant interest of getting students back on track towards graduation. These points may build a case for why university counsellors are a rich source of the explicit and implicit pressures on student support services.

The above studies have offered some insightful accounts into the pressures experienced by university counsellors. However, it is as if most of this research has focused on practitioners' perspectives of working in this setting, as opposed to exploring their experiences of counselling distinct or commonly presenting problems among students. This indicates a need for understanding counsellors' perspectives that could give insight on how to handle such problems effectively. Accordingly, Strawbridge (2016) highlights that CoP research is driven by questions that arise from the challenges of practice and that learning from other practitioners' experiences is deemed vital when acquiring the competence needed for such complex practices. However, the paucity of

research on the therapeutic processes that underlie effective outcomes in HE indicates a clear gap in the current HE counselling literature that will also be of relevance for Counselling Psychologists choosing to work in such academic settings.

The main research on procrastination in academic settings has been conducted in the US and Netherlands (Schouwenburg, Lay, Pychyl, & Ferrari, 2004; Steel, 2007) and although rates vary across studies it is identified as a commonly presenting issue in university counselling services (e.g. Gallagher, Golin, & Kelleher, 1992; Klingsieck, 2013; Schouwenburg et al., 2004). Given its wide prevalence, and the financial pressures in HE, there has been a call for the development of cost- and resource-effective interventions for procrastination. As such, recent research seems to be focusing on various internet-based treatments for this problem (Glick & Orsillo, 2015; Rozental, Forsell, Svensson, Andersson, & Carlbring, 2015; Topman, Kruise, & Beijne, 2004). While there is no evidence for these online interventions to-date, Connell et al.'s (2008) earlier findings indicate outcome effectiveness of face-to-face counselling with student concerns, including "academic problems". As the researchers have not operationalised this term, it could be reasonable to presume that it also encompasses procrastination, which, consequently, implies treatment effectiveness with this issue. However, further to the abovementioned limitations of the HE treatment literature, this indicated treatment effectiveness with academic problems, or procrastination, seems further obscured by the absence of a unified or clear understanding of procrastination to-date.

1.3 Defining Procrastination in the Context of this Research

Definitions of procrastination are reviewed here to highlight how historical references and more recent psychological research have contributed to our current understanding of this phenomenon. The word *procrastination* is derived from the Latin verb *procrastinare*, which is a composition of *pro* and *crastinus* that respectively mean “forward, forth, or in favour of” and “of tomorrow” (Ferrari, Johnson, & McCown, 1995; Steel, 2007). Thus, postponement or delay is indicated in the term. The extant literature mainly defines this notion of “favouring tomorrow” as problematic with negative connotations. However, occasionally procrastination is used to refer to functional or strategic delay (e.g. Schraw et al., 2007) although this perspective seems to be of secondary importance in Western culture, as indicated further below.

1.3.1 Pre-psychological definitions of procrastination

These early accounts of procrastination originate from contextual influences down the ages in Western cultures. For example, the ancient Egyptians had two contrasting verbs which have been translated as meaning *to procrastinate*. One indicates the useful or helpful tendency to avoid unnecessary labour and impulsivity, while the other is distinguished as relating to laziness with detrimental consequences for avoiding necessary work (Ferrari et al., 1995). Concurring with the latter Egyptian construct, a subsequent reference traced back to Ancient Greece (around 800 BC) highlights the unprofitable consequences of procrastination in an agrarian context:

“Do not put your work off till to-morrow and the day after; for a sluggish worker does not fill his barn...a man who puts off work is always at hand-grips with ruin.” (Hesiod as cited in Steel, 2007, p.3)

The quote highlights the disadvantage of procrastination as postponement of important work such as gathering in the harvest in time otherwise one could be ruined. In the dictionary, the term *sluggish* denotes individuals who are inclined to be slothful (Oxford English Dictionary online, n.d.). *Sloth*² was a popular term during the Late Middle Ages and used in agrarian social milieus to express disdain towards those exhibiting physical inactivity or avoidance (Ferrari et al., 1995). This shows that the way we understand procrastination today is culturally influenced by particular social values of what is valued as important to do on time and what can be postponed.

Historical references to procrastination seem consistent across the centuries in Western culture. Here, putting off or hesitation is either conceptualised as a particularly negative trait or viewed in binary terms; which consider procrastination as mainly negative but occasionally positive, depending on the context. For example, writings by Athenian general Thucydides (around 444 BC) on the Spartan war illustrates this point further:

“Do not be ashamed of the slowness and procrastination with which they are so fond of charging you; if you begin the war in haste, you will end it at your leisure, because you took up arms without sufficient preparation” (Thucydides 1.84)

Thucydides illustrates that whilst procrastination is recognised as a criticised human tendency which elicits judgements from others; he also defines it as an important tactic implemented in the context war. Similarly, Ancient Romans’ uses of this concept seem to reflect the idea that deferred judgement may be wise or necessary, such as enduring

² The term also implies active manipulation of offloading one’s work onto others (Ferrari et al., 1995); though this meaning is considered of secondary importance to the concept of procrastination and to the current research inquiry.

a period of waiting and demonstrating patience during a military conflict (Ferrari et al., 1995). These brief historical references highlight that dominant contextual pressures regarding performance behaviours communicate various messages about what is normal or abnormal with regards to expectations of timeliness and procrastination. Hence, illustrating that which may be considered procrastination is variable across different time periods, contexts and cultures.

The truly negative connotations in relation to the phenomenon became more prevalent in the advent of an industrialised society (circa 1750), with increasing value being placed on punctuality and efficiency (Ferrari et al., 1995). These meanings are covertly embedded in the social norms of the Western society whose interest is to form the next generation's workforce, as noted by O'Callaghan (2010) and Rose (1998) among others. Arguably, these cultural expectations may still influence the contextual pressures in contemporary university settings whose learning ethos gives social value to timely compliance with meeting deadlines. Students' behaviours seem regulated by giving social importance to compliance with institutional requirements, whilst penalising those who transgress this norm without good reasons. Consequently, with industrialised countries' emphasis on timely performance procrastination is distinguished as a distinct problem.

1.3.2 Psychological definitions of procrastination

With the emergence of psychology as a distinct discipline in the 20th Century Western cultures, interestingly, the phenomenon of procrastination did not become of popular scientific research interest until the 1980s. Some of the definitions from traditional

psychological studies will be briefly overviewed here (to be considered in more depth in Chapter Two).

“Procrastination is a puzzle for the notion of self-control at the heart of the intentional, anthropomorphic model: the procrastinator is...someone who knows what (s)he wants to do, in some sense can do it, is trying to do it – yet doesn’t do it.” (Silver & Sabini, 1981, p.207)

The above definition conveys that the individual does not purposefully seek to ignore the task. The broad portrayal of the individual as competent highlights the perplexing nature of procrastination as the individual does not follow up on their original work plans. Hence, procrastination refers to the failure of intention implementation. Further, the component of intentionality seems important when distinguishing procrastination from other delay behaviours; as putting off tasks, which are originally intended to be postponed, is not procrastination (Anderson, 2003; Klingsieck, 2013). Thus, procrastination is cast as a goal-undermining “intention-action gap” (Silver & Sabini, 1981) which has led researchers to define the behaviour as self-defeating:

“Procrastination, the act of needlessly delaying tasks to the point of experiencing subjective discomfort” (Solomon & Rothblum, 1984, p.503)

The notion of “needlessly” suggests that no essential or objective reason drives individuals to procrastinate. Furthermore, they delay despite the implication of negative consequences; as coined by the above reference to “subjective discomfort”. Procrastinating despite its detrimental outcomes, in the face of contextual pressures for

performance, has acquired its “irrational” label (e.g. Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). This irrationality is further reflected in the dictionary definition of procrastination: “defer action, especially without good reason” (Oxford English Dictionary online, n.d.). Furthermore, the inferential subjective discomfort may be of particular relevance to psychologists as individuals seem to act in a maladaptive or self-destructive manner which results in emotional upset as well as reduced performance (e.g. Rothblum, Solomon, & Murakami, 1986; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984; Tice & Baumeister, 1997). Milgram and his associates (1992; 1993; 1995) echoed this by highlighting the psychological distress that seems distinctive for procrastination. According to Milgram (1991, p.149), describing procrastination as an irrational self-defeating action with negative repercussions, distinguishes the behaviour from other types of postponement:

“Procrastination is not merely a curious human aberration, one of the many instances in which people fail to pursue their interests in an efficient and productive manner. It represents a dysfunction of human abilities that are important, if not essential for coping with the myriad tasks that accumulate daily on our desks, in our memo books or in our minds. When we procrastinate we waste time, miss opportunities and do not live authentic lives.” (Milgram, 1991, p.149)

Milgram (1991) defines the behaviour as abnormal, dysfunctional and impeding on individuals’ daily living; described as a disease which is eating away at individual’s productivity. A considerable number of studies have concurred with Milgram by defining procrastination as maladaptive or problematic (to be considered in more depth in Chapter Two). These widely assumed negative conceptions of procrastination may be understood in relation to the profound changes of Western society over recent

decades. Since the 1990s personal computers, smartphones and mobile internet access have gradually become commonplace in individuals' lives. The societal changes produced by these technological advances seem to impact on when, how and where we work (e.g. Steel, 2007). Constant temptations for procrastination seem to be influenced rather than mitigated by this digitalisation of society; producing procrastination as also a "disease eating away at student productivity" (Knezevic, 2012, para. 2).

Of late, psychologists have become interested in accounts which challenge the predominant negative definitions of procrastination. Here, procrastination is described as a conscious strategic tactic used to enhance productivity in the face of an impending deadline. One of the few qualitative studies in this field (Schraw et al., 2007) asserts that such strategic procrastination does not have a negative impact on performance. Schraw et al. (2007) describe:

"[Individuals] procrastinated intentionally to improve the overall quality and efficiency of their lives, even though it added stress and tension late in each semester for relatively short periods of time...because added stress and tension were necessary components in the procrastination cycle that enabled them to perform at peak efficiency" (Schraw et al., 2007, p.23)

Definitions of this nature occur across a number of studies which construct procrastination as adaptive, functional or successful (e.g. Choi & Moran, 2009; Chu & Choi, 2005; Ferrari, 1992). These accounts define procrastination as a strategy implemented by those who may require high levels of stimulation to acquire the motivation necessary for task accomplishment. Consequently, constructions of the

behaviour as an intention-action discrepancy are challenged. Hence, it is indicated that procrastination may denote both constructive and dysfunctional delay behaviours. Such accounts of “successful procrastination” (e.g. Schraw et al., 2007) seem to have sparked some debate in the literature as they strongly contradict dominant psychological definitions of the behaviour as unintentional, problematic and dysfunctional.

In a recent review of the extant psychological procrastination research Klingsieck (2013) takes issue with literature that describes the behaviour as functional. She argues that successful or intentional instances of procrastination are marginal in comparison to problem accounts of the phenomenon. With the aim to understand procrastination in a way that both encompasses its various causes and highlights its problematic propensities, Klingsieck offers the following description:

“The voluntary delay of an intended and necessary and/or (personally) important activity, despite expecting potential negative consequences that outweigh the positive consequences of the delay” (Klingsieck, 2013, p.216).

Klingsieck’s (2013) definition reasserts that procrastination is unintentional and distinguished from “successful” cases of strategic delay, as it is required to have negative consequences to classify as procrastination. Klingsieck’s recent account and the brief exploration on definitions (provided above) stress two predominant implications of relevance to CoP research. Firstly, it highlights the implied challenge in extant attempts to investigate and define procrastination as its many mutable meanings that vary across individuals’ norms, attributions and contexts (including the socio-cultural, historical and political influences of their inhabited environment). These

varied and personal meanings seem obscured by the linear measures commonly favoured in the extant quantitative research (see Chapter Two: 2.2). Secondly, accounts on the detrimental aspect of procrastination, as recently reemphasised by Klingsieck (2013), recognise that convenience samples formed by self-elected participants may not represent individuals who find it particularly hard to cope and perhaps seek counselling for their difficulties (Patzek, Grunschel, & Fries, 2012). Hence, the next section will explore definitions on procrastination as derived from therapeutic literatures.

1.3.3 Therapeutic definitions of procrastination

Similar to psychological researchers' attempts to define procrastination, counselling literatures also provide different meanings for the term. Therapeutic perspectives may be of particular relevance to CoP given that these accounts have, mainly, developed from the authors' therapeutic engagement with this problem in counselling contexts. These diverse theories have offered definitions on procrastination that draw mainly on psychodynamic³, behavioural and cognitive-behavioural approaches. To introduce the extant understanding of procrastination in the context of therapy, some of these ideas will be briefly overviewed in this section (see Chapter Two for an in-depth literature review). The earliest distinction of procrastination, from a therapeutic perspective, is offered in Freud's (1926/1936) account on inhibitions to professional work, such as the act of writing:

“The subject feels a decrease in his pleasure in it or becomes less able to do it well; or he has certain reactions to it, like fatigue, giddiness or sickness, if he is obliged to

³ The theories specifically affiliated with Freud and his fellows will be denoted as *psychoanalytic*; whilst subsequently evolved theories originated from classical psychoanalytic thinking (Levy, 1963) will be referred to as *psychodynamic* principles. Further, the latter may be used as an umbrella term when referring to both of these perspectives.

go on with it". Freud continues, "*he will be perpetually distracted from his work or losing time over it through the introduction of delays and repetitions*". Where such "*inhibition is the expression of a restriction of an ego-function. A restriction of this kind can itself have very different causes*" (Freud, 1926/1936, p.89).

Freud's (1926/1936) describes the repetition of unproductive behaviours, which resembles procrastination, as a manifestation of internal processes that render the individual incessantly distractible and inhibited from engaging with their work. Birner (1993) offers a more recent, and concise, psychodynamic definition:

"Procrastination is defined as the act of delaying or postponing an action into the future. In the extreme it is a very serious problem signaling profound conflict"

(Birner, 1993, p.541)

As captured above, psychodynamic theory, generally, constructs procrastination as an, at times complex, issue with varied causes. While psychodynamic theory views procrastination as a predominantly intrapsychic problem, by contrast, behaviourists (e.g. Miller, 1944; Skinner, 1953) assert that behaviours persist due to learning and reinforcement. The following definition constructs procrastination from a behaviourist perspective:

"Procrastination pattern is found when an aversive situation establishes an unpleasant response to a neutral stimulus associated in time and place with the original aversive stimulus; thereafter, one continue to behave as if the original episode were about to recur, and avoids performing actions associated with it.

Procrastination patterns are also established on the bases of their anxiety-reducing properties” (Mowrer, cited in Milgram, 1987)

As this definition indicates, from the behaviourist paradigm, procrastination is understood in terms of learning and consequences. Thus, Skinner’s (1953) *Theory of Reinforcement* can be used to explain that individuals feel more rewarded by procrastinating than pursuing their work. Behaviourist accounts on procrastination have been cast as simplistic, by insufficiently accounting for individual factors, when emphasising overt behaviour (e.g. Ferrari et al., 1995). By contrast, cognitive-behavioural theory has made contributions by defining procrastination as a behaviour that manifests from individuals’ perceptions of a situation or task as unrewarding (e.g. Dryden, 2012; Ellis & Knaus, 1977). This notion falls along the same lines of reasoning as some of the psychological research that defines procrastination as irrational (see above: 1.3.2). A more in-depth consideration of these cognitive-behavioural notions will be offered in Chapter Two.

1.4 Rationale for the Current Research

This chapter has highlighted the growing prevalence of procrastination in Western cultures, with particular prominence in HE settings. This has led to considerations of procrastination as a popular presenting issue in student counselling services. Yet, there is a dearth of rigorous treatment research with this problem. University counsellors seem particularly insightful sources in academic counselling. However, the few studies that have investigated their experiences to-date seem to have focused on their perspectives on working in this context, as opposed to exploring their practices or how they, specifically, understand and work with certain student issues. This research area

seems particularly interesting as these practitioners seem pressured to find effective ways of working with student problems. While psychological research attempts seem challenged in grasping and defining procrastination, some therapeutic perspectives construct it as a complex issue to address in therapy. Learning from other practitioners is considered vital when acquiring competence for complex practice situations and a qualitative approach may enable access to the subjective experiences of university counsellors who have worked with procrastination.

With the aim to offer a detailed insight into the phenomenological inquiry on this group of homogenous individuals, an IPA methodology was chosen to answer the research question: *“how do university counsellors understand and experience working therapeutically with procrastination as a presenting problem?”*

To conclude, this chapter has aimed to introduce a rationale to justify this proposed research. By introducing procrastination and identifying the importance of HE counselling, in relation to CoP, this first chapter has sought to present a timely and persuasive argument for the meaningfulness of CoP research in the area. The critical review in Chapter Two will expand and develop the psychological and therapeutic procrastination literatures introduced in this chapter; this will be done with the aim to identify gaps in the current research and offer a rationale for how the present study aims to address this gap with its given research question. Chapter Three will provide a detailed rationale for the chosen methodology as well as demonstrate the ethical conduct of this research. Chapter Four will present the results of the research findings. Finally, Chapter Five will conclude this thesis by discussing the implications of the findings in relation to extant literature and offer an evaluation of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview

This literature review expands and develops Chapter One. When deciding on which aspects of the extensive literature⁴ to include, the selection has been based on understandings that are of relevance to Counselling Psychology (CoP). To this end, this chapter will review procrastination as a subject of inquiry in psychological and therapeutic literatures, which includes how different theoretical perspectives have understood procrastination and their potential implications for CoP practice. These literatures and their remediation recommendations, including considerations of the potential barriers to counselling, will be discussed with relevance to the critical realist stance that informs this study. This critical review aims to highlight the gap in the relevant psychological and therapeutic research related to procrastination with particular emphasis on the academic context. Further developing the rationale introduced in Chapter One, this chapter will conclude with the rationale for this study which aims to answer the research question: “*how do university counsellors understand and experience working therapeutically with procrastination as a presenting problem?*”

⁴ Literature searches were strategically conducted on various databases such as Ebscohost (including searches on PsychInfo, PsycArticles, PsycBooks, eBook Collection and Academic Search Premier), ScienceDirect, PEP-Web, Google Scholar and known specialist publications such as *Counselling Psychology Review*; *University and College Counselling Journal* amongst many others. The keyword *procrastination* and alternative thesaurus terms, major headings or related citations were also used in searches. These words were used both in isolation or accompanying other words related to the research topic; such as *counselling* or *academic* for instance.

2.2 Psychological Research on Procrastination

“To procrastinate is to voluntarily delay a course of action despite expecting to be worse off for the delay” (Steel, 2007, p.66).

Over the past three decades, extensive empirical research efforts have focused on defining and conceptualising the common every-day problem known as “procrastination”. Cross-cultural studies point to an international prevalence of 15-25% in the general population (e.g. Ferrari, Díaz-Morales, O'Callaghan, Díaz, & Argumedo, 2007; Ferrari, Özer, & Demir, 2009), these rates are considerably higher, albeit inconsistent, among university students. Studies report that up to 70% of these students consider themselves procrastinators (e.g. Schouwenburg, 2004b) and 50% procrastinate problematically and consistently (Day, Mensink, & O'Sullivan, 2000; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). This frequency is concerning given that procrastination seems to be increasing (e.g. Steel, 2007) and considering its negative consequences.

The detrimental nature of procrastination is highlighted in a number of studies. For example, Stead, Shanahan and Neufeld's (2010) study point to a relationship between procrastination and students' general mental health. Similarly, others report that completing work under time-pressured circumstances may evoke higher anxiety levels among students and an overall sense of lacking control over one's life (Rothblum et al., 1986; Tice & Baumeister, 1997). Further negative implications are indicated in studies that emphasise the self-critical and disparaging thought process experienced by some procrastinating individuals (Sirois & Pychyl, 2013; Sirois, 2014; Stainton, Lay, & Flett, 2000). Finally, Van Eerde (2003) highlights some distal consequences when arguing that students' unresolved procrastination can have problematic implications for those

who enter performance-driven employments that expect timeliness and productivity. While some concerns of procrastination seem identified, Patrzek et al. (2012) argue that such research findings tend to be limited for using convenience sampling without taking into consideration whether participants feel that they are coping or not. Nonetheless, the negative consequences of procrastination seem implied, as it is a common presenting issue in student counselling services (Schouwenburg et al., 2004).

Some of the methodological limitations in the extant literature is further emphasised in a recent review by Klingsieck (2013). She describes the growing body of procrastination research as consisting of studies that have developed in isolation from one another, in a form of “unsystematic coexistence” (Klingsieck, 2013, p.25). Accordingly, the research seems condensed in some areas, such as inquiries that construct procrastination as a stable behaviour that is mainly mediated by the proximity of a deadline (e.g. Steel, 2007). Meanwhile, research into the contextual factors that may affect individuals’ productivity is in its early days of development, such as influences from one’s relationships or the institution (e.g. Klingsieck, Grund, Schmid, & Fries, 2013). A thorough understanding of the underlying patterns to individuals’ procrastination are particularly relevant for CoP, whose ethos is firmly grounded in understanding subjective experiences (see Chapter One: 1.2); additionally, an understanding of the causes and consequences of procrastination is necessary to offer effective interventions (Ferrari et al., 1995).

Albeit the literature omits a clear or universally agreed operational definition (see Chapter One for review), Glick and Orsillo (2015) inform that the above definition, offered in industrial/organisational psychologist Steel’s (2007) comprehensive meta-

analysis, seems widely accepted in the field. While Klingsieck (2013) critiques this definition for inadequately emphasising the negative consequences of procrastination, the influence from Steel's (2007) study seems to have been extensive as it appears to be the most cited psychological research study on procrastination to-date⁵.

Overall, the 216 quantitative studies included in Steel's (2007) review tend to construct procrastination as a stable and reoccurring phenomenon. With the aim to offer a conceptual foundation for procrastination as a stable trait, by establishing its causes and correlates, Steel has approached the then extant research by categorising the preceding studies, as well his own findings, into Costa and McCrae's (1992) five-factor model of personality. His findings indicate a strong correlation between procrastination and the Conscientiousness ($r = -.62$) personality trait (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This might have particular implications for the therapeutic practice of CoP as, for example, Van Eerde (2003; 2004) suggests that low Conscientiousness has been negatively correlated to behavioural inflexibility and inhibited creativity. Such stable characteristics can thus be seen as posing a challenge to the brief therapy predominantly offered in HE (e.g. RCP, 2011), considering the level of collaboration and adaptability required for therapeutic effectiveness from short-term contracts (e.g. Rickinson, 1997). These findings suggest that procrastination is challenging to address in HE counselling, thus highlighting the value in exploring these practitioners' in-depth accounts on how they manage this aspect of their work.

Despite the personality model's wide recognition in psychology research, its broad traits are arguably limited in offering specificity into individuals' underlying motives

⁵ As noted when conducting the literature search via Google Scholar.

and unique experiences of procrastination (e.g. Steel, 2007). To offer specificity Steel (2007) has sought to identify procrastination's nomological web by reviewing previous research on a facet-level from the Conscientiousness trait. Consequently, he has linked procrastination to constructs including distractibility, organisational skills, self-control/-discipline, intention-action discrepancies and achievement motivation. These correlations suggest that procrastinating individuals are highly sensitive to distractions and require particular competence or skill to stay on an intended path, while tasks perceived as aversive further compromise their motivation (Steel, 2007). To explain these findings, Steel (2007) offers his *Temporal Motivation Theory* (Steel & König, 2006): a mathematical formulation that can be used to describe procrastination from a time discounting perspective. In other words, a task with distal rewards motivates individuals to procrastinate with immediately gratifying activities (Steel, 2007). Thus, Steel argues that procrastination seems representative of another conceptually ambiguous concept, also characteristic of low Conscientiousness, namely self-regulation failure.

Self-regulation is broadly described as the tendency to keep focused on a purposed task or a long-term goal in the face of temptations (Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998; Steel, 2007). However, similar to procrastination, the self-regulation literature seems shaped by studies conducted in isolation from one another and thus developed both overlapping and fragmented findings (Zeidner, Boekaerts & Pintrich, cited in Steel, 2007). While further elaboration on their conceptual similarities exceeds the scope of this thesis, their suggested relationship could possibly be relevant from a mental health perspective, as other forms of self-regulation failure have been known as gambling,

excessive spending or debt (Steel, 2007) as well as smoking or dieting (cited in Muraven et al., 1998).

The above temporal discounting perspective seems to have been particularly influential to counselling practices, as, according to Schouwenburg (2004a), self-regulation training (see below) is a crucial component of many counselling approaches for procrastination in academic settings. However, similar to general trends in counselling, most interventions programmes for procrastination also incorporate cognitive components that target the unhelpful beliefs that may underpin the behaviour (Schouwenburg, 2004a). It thus seems particularly interesting that Steel (2007) has explicitly rejected the relationship between procrastination and Neuroticism facets (Costa & McCrae, 1992); including irrational beliefs, such as fear of failure, and anxiety. While some therapeutic literatures emphasise the role of irrational beliefs/anxiety (see below: 2.3), Steel argues that this claimed relationship is due to publication bias, mediated by the public's popular interest in procrastination, as opposed to statistical accuracy. This debate is particularly interesting as it raises three predominant issues concerning the trending research on procrastination and its applicability to the therapeutic practice of CoP.

Firstly, work that has addressed procrastination in a non-statistical way has been excluded from Steel's (2007) analysis, including psychodynamic case studies (e.g. Birner, 1993; Holzman, 1964; Schuman, 1981) and other counselling literatures (e.g. Ferrari et al., 1995; Knaus, 2000; Rorer, 1983; Schouwenburg et al., 2004). By contrast, most studies included in the meta-analysis have used convenience sampling with undergraduate students. As some of Steel's findings vividly contrast the clinically

informed therapeutic literatures (see subsections below), it is thus unclear whether data from non-clinical convenience samples reflect the concerns of individuals who seek counselling for their procrastination.

Secondly, in a more recent review, Rozental and Carlbring (2014) attribute the statistically non-significant correlation between irrational beliefs and procrastination in Steel's (2007) analysis to inconsistencies across the studies it includes. They argue that studies in this field tend to inadequately operationalise *irrational beliefs* and thus measure various cognitions under one tenet. This highlights the need for further rigorous research in this field. Thirdly, Schouwenburg (2004b) argues that irrational beliefs are considered more distal in comparison to competence-related reasons and thus only show a weak correlation in quantitative studies, which seems to have been the case in Steel's analysis.

These issues highlight some limitations concerning convenience sampling and quantitative methodologies to investigate procrastination. Arguably, such inquiries expect participants to be introspective and have a degree of self-insight to convey the more hidden aspects of their difficulties (e.g. irrational beliefs) through self-evaluation questionnaires that ought to capture the varied patterns that may underlie individuals' procrastination. Some of these issues are particularly well highlighted in a qualitative study by Grunschel, Patrzek and Fries (2012) that set out to investigate whether a convenience sample would report different causes and consequences of procrastination when compared with a clinical participant group.

To explore different student perspectives Grunschel et al. (2012) have recruited participants (N=20) who self-identify as problematically procrastinating (non-counselling group) in addition to a cohort (N=16) who have received counselling at their institutions' student support services (counselling group). They report that the most common reasons for the non-counselling group seem competence-related, including references to a lack of the study skills (e.g. poor time management and goal setting) or knowledge required for task completion. The counselling participants, on the other hand, indicate low self-regulation as the predominant cause for delaying. Albeit this confirms Steel's (2007) theory on procrastination as low self-regulation, Grunschel et al. expand on the nuances of self-regulation by emphasising both internal factors, such as anxiety and unhelpful beliefs, as well as contextual influences such as institutional pressures and social factors. Thus, according to Grunschel et al. the behaviour is multi-layered; a finding which closely resembles two broadly concurring qualitative studies, which have explored students' accounts on reasons for procrastinating (Klingsieck et al., 2013) and university counsellors' perspectives on its causes and consequences, based on their clinical practices with this presentation (Patzek et al., 2012).

In the advent of the abovementioned qualitative studies, some implications may be drawn with relevance to the extant literature. For example, these research findings highlight that data from non-clinical student procrastinators (Grunschel et al., 2012; Klingsieck et al., 2013) may not reflect those who seek counselling (Grunschel et al., 2012; Patzek et al., 2012). For instance, the counsellors in Patzek et al.'s (2012) study acknowledge that some irrevocably procrastinate and subsequently fail their course, while the counselling cohort in Grunschel et al.'s (2012) study report more anxiety than

their non-counselling counterpart. Albeit, by contrast, Grunschel et al. discuss the possibility that participants, across the two groups in their study, may experience similar distress than conveyed in the findings. However, due to counselling, participants may have acquired a greater capacity for introspection and self-insight to convey their process (Grunschel et al., 2012). As the non-counselling participants tend to report more competence-related reasons for procrastinating (Grunschel et al., 2012). The implications of these findings may highlight why Steel's (2007) meta-analysis did not find statistically significant correlations to the deeper layers of procrastination (i.e. anxiety and irrational beliefs).

Moreover, the extant research findings may be further obscured by the dominant methodologies that measure a non-clinical student sample's self-evaluation responses alongside instruments measuring other variables that, sometimes erroneously, infer causal claims. Findings from such correlational studies are perhaps limited in capturing this multifaceted phenomenon, as evidenced by recent qualitative research (Grunschel et al., 2012; Klingsieck et al., 2013; Patrzek et al., 2012). Consequently, qualitative methodologies seem most appropriate when investigating this multilayered and, at times, complex phenomenon. With the aim to conduct a literature review with upmost relevance to the theory and practices of CoP, this chapter will now turn to the literatures that have addressed procrastination from a therapeutic perspective.

2.3 Procrastination from the Psychodynamic Perspective

Overall, the psychodynamic perspective emphasises unconscious events, wishes and fears and/or childhood experiences as responsible for the behaviours that characterise procrastination. The earliest psychoanalytic account traces back to Freud (1926/1936) who describes the repetition of unproductive behaviours, when one is meant to work, as a form of substitute for other psychosexually gratifying urges such as sexual conflict and masturbatory guilt. He suggests that such behaviours are rooted in a fixation at the latency phase during infancy that resumes at adolescence where the individual exhibits a preference for procrastination over work behaviours. By using classical psychoanalytic theory on intrapsychic processes, Freud (1926/1936) explains that the behaviour manifests as a means for the ego to avoid a conflict with the Id. His early ideas have been extended by subsequent theories which, largely, conceptualise procrastination as a manifestation of an earlier fixation.

Fenichel (1945) elaborates on the psychoanalytic perspective by attributing procrastination to a fixation from the anal stage of psychosexual development, when externally imposed demands, such as parental requirements of potty training, require the child to delay (hold on to) or avoid (let go of) gratifications. However, if this newfound anal retention is perceived as excessively gratifying, toddlers may come to resent or defy these external requirements, as the faeces are considered *their* possession, which they desire to withhold or eliminate in their own time (Fenichel, 1945). According to Fenichel, a fixation here could result in repression of these impulses and adult procrastination may thus function as an acceptable outlet for such repressions. He adds that these individuals may grow sensitive and resistant to act on externally imposed demands, and rather adhere to their own pace according to *their* timetable. It

is however pointed out that these individuals are unlikely to directly protest against such pressures and, instead, passively rebel by procrastinating (Fenichel, 1945). Fenichel's work broadly resembles Schuman's (1981) subsequent psychoanalytic case study that constructs the behaviour as individuals' attempts to remain in a child state, free from the responsibility and autonomy of adulthood.

Fenichel's (1945) work has been negatively evaluated for being overly narrow by reducing the emergence of procrastination to a very particular time of an individual's development (Schafer, 1976). In fact, Schafer (1976) has critiqued both Freud (e.g. 1926/1936) and Fenichel's (1945) work for losing sight of the person when overemphasising the influences of instinctive drives' on adults who, in turn, are characterised as being at the mercy of their intrapsychic structures. Hence, interpersonal influences from the adult's context seem omitted in the above theories. Horney (1945) has offered further consideration of conflict behaviours, such as procrastination, from an interpersonal perspective.

Horney (1945) characterises conflict behaviours, such as procrastination, as stemming from social or cultural influences on one's intrapsychic drives. For example, through this socio-cultural emphasis, Horney stresses that unmet interpersonal needs can evoke procrastination. For instance, concerns about others' attitudes towards oneself, or unmet needs for approval by others, or worries about failing to complete a task in a manner that proves one's superiority; these are all examples of unresolved interpersonal conflict that may compromise one's concentration. Horney's notion seems to have influenced Salzman's (1973) subsequent work, which suggests that some individuals procrastinate to remain omniscient by not risking failure. According to Salzman,

procrastination seems to prevent individuals from jeopardising the potential exposure of their weaknesses or shortcomings. This seems to indicate that procrastination may help to protect against anxieties related to such exposure.

Some subsequent psychodynamic theories have carried forward the interpersonal perspective by describing procrastination as a manifestation from earlier parent-child interactions. For instance, Missildine (1963) relates the adult's procrastination to earlier experiences where parents have imposed pressures about achievement. According to Missildine, possible procrastination may manifest from childhood experiences when attempts to reach parents' high, sometimes unrealistic, targets became synonymous with attaining their love and acceptance. Thus, procrastination difficulties can be viewed as a re-enactment of past experiences where one's sense of worth has been tied to goal accomplishment (Missildine, 1963). Similarly, Macintyre (1964) asserts that individuals reared by authoritarian parents may develop resentment towards the authority of time and thus rebel against impending deadlines. By highlighting the possible developmental roots of the behaviour, these theories arguably offer particularly nuanced and complex accounts when compared to psychological research findings.

However, a small number of studies offer some empirical support for psychodynamic concepts on procrastination. For instance, Ferrari and Olivette (1993; 1994) have investigated participants' retrospective accounts on their parents' rearing style and presented findings that seem to support the relationship between procrastination and authoritarian parenting (MacIntyre, 1964). Regarding the development of adult procrastination, Ferrari and Olivette's former study postulate that mothers'

authoritarian style has more influence than fathers do, while the latter study suggests the reverse (Ferrari & Olivette, 1993; 1994). Milgram, Mey-Tal and Leison (1998) critique these studies for drawing conclusions from inconclusive or low correlation values. However, their study, which has investigated both the procrastinator's and their parent's retrospective accounts, also present weak correlational data (Milgram et al., 1998). Albeit, they argue that these findings are more convincing for drawing on multiple perspectives.

According to the overall psychodynamic approach, procrastination seems rooted in early developmental fixations which problematically manifests in environments where autonomous performance according to external demands are required. Equally, the psychodynamic perspective may be critiqued for inadequately supporting its notions with empirical data. Its concepts have been limited for lacking empirical support, particularly by theorists who favour linear measurements when investigating human functioning (Ferrari et al., 1995; Kantor, 1953). Considering the complex and intrapsychic processes inferred in psychodynamic thinking, it might seem expected that its endorsers dispute such criticism (Ferrari et al., 1995; Kantor, 1953). While findings from the above studies are inconclusive, psychodynamic theory may have highlighted some valuable perspectives of relevance to procrastination counselling.

When reviewing the counselling literature for procrastination, a dearth of psychodynamic work seems apparent. Milgram (1987) postulates that psychodynamic treatment for procrastination consists of three stages. Firstly, such interventions seek to enhance clients' awareness about unconscious processes that underpin the procrastination and, secondly, these psychic events need to be modified and integrated

into clients' self-concept to, finally, enable clients to dispense the original unconscious psychic events (Milgram, 1987). These therapeutic aims seem reflective of psychodynamic case studies exclusively dedicated to procrastination (Birner, 1993; Holzman, 1964; Schuman, 1981). For example, Holzman (1964) argues that enhanced self-insight can enable clients to see the perpetuation of an old pattern, which in turn may enable a healthier way of managing. Similarly, Birner (1993) highlights that therapy can help unveiling, understanding and work through the underlying motives that interfere with productivity. However, it is unclear how these treatment aims directly translate into the therapeutic practice with a procrastinating client. Accordingly, Schuman's (1981) highlights the absence of specific psychodynamic techniques for dealing with procrastination in practice.

While specific techniques seem omitted in the extant psychodynamic treatment literature, this approach recognises the potential complexity inherent in procrastination counselling. For instance, Birner (1993) notes that clients' procrastination may permeate the therapy milieu and manifest through enactments such as clients' late arrival, non-attendance or late payments. Birner (1993) adds that these clients' proneness to delay, hesitation, inactivity or inaction may further impede the work by yielding the therapist with difficulties to offer effective interventions. Meanwhile, the therapist may be rendered feeling powerless to help (Birner, 1993). Feelings of impatience, helplessness, anger, boredom and suspense are noted in the transference (Birner, 1993; Holzman, 1964). These accounts may offer some valuable insights into procrastination counselling as clients' tendencies to procrastinate might delay or stall their therapeutic progress. This issue has been raised across the board including, for example, in rational-emotive behavioural therapy (REBT) accounts (Dryden, 2012, see

below: 2.4). As no investigation has been conducted on university counsellors' perspectives on counselling procrastination, it would be interesting to learn whether the issues raised here manifest in their real-life practices.

The above case studies are based on treatment that has lasted over a number of years, with multiple weekly sessions, which seems to have enabled these therapists to reflect on how to utilise their experiences towards effective interventions and thus overcome such potential therapeutic ruptures. Such countertransference reactions can, for instance, equip counsellors with insightful details about their clients (e.g. Joseph, 1985). The effectiveness this was demonstrated by Schuman (1981) who used countertransference as a vehicle for change in a way that seemed particularly effective with a procrastinating client. However, given the open-ended nature of such case studies, their applicability to contemporary and brief counselling provision may be limited. For instance, Ferrari et al. (1995) advise that brief psychotherapy with procrastination presentations may be problematic as it is unlikely that short-term contracts will enable the full unfolding of its meaning or offer an opportunity to work through these. Moreover, Schouwenburg (2004a) adds that university counsellors may tend to implement behavioural approaches with these student clients, as behavioural modification may be regarded the only feasible route given the time constraints of academic counselling settings. Thus, as the (somewhat dated) psychodynamic literatures on procrastination are sourced in non-academic contexts, it would be interesting to learn whether they reflect the real-life experiences of university counsellors.

2.4 Procrastination from Behavioural and Cognitive Perspectives

Ferrari et al. (1995) suggests that the behaviourist perspective has developed from disagreements with psychodynamic theory, as their ideas on intrapsychic processes are cast as unmeasurable and mere hypothetical. By contrast, behaviourists understand procrastination in the context of Skinner's (e.g. 1969) *contingencies of reinforcement*. Thus, similar to Steel's (2007) paper, according to behaviourists, many procrastinate tasks they find unpleasant by prioritising immediately gratifying activities (e.g. Ferrari et al., 1995). However, solely considering procrastination in terms of these reinforcers may oversimplify behaviourist accounts on this issue. A review of Miller's (1944) work may offer a deeper understanding of procrastination from the behaviourist perspective.

Based on controlled laboratory studies, Miller (1944) expands Lewin's (1935) original theory on approach-avoidance conflict behaviour. Here, a situation of conflict emerges when both approach and avoidance, procrastination in this context, of a task are compelling alternatives (Lewin, 1935; Miller, 1944). According to Miller, an experiential pull draws the individual to the opposite direction when engaged with either of these responses. The individual is thus inclined towards whichever option that elicits the least discomfort at that given time (Miller, 1944). Ferrari et al. (1995) have contextualised Miller's ideas with direct relevance to academic procrastination. According to Ferrari et al., while procrastination may be favoured in the face of a distal deadline, discomfort gradually peaks in parallel with a nearing deadline and continued avoidance ceases to be the more comfortable option, which ultimately triggers an approach response. Consequently, frantic last-minute studying is required for task completion, creating a familiar and uncomfortable situation for those who recurrently

procrastinate (Ferrari et al., 1995). Findings from two empirical studies seem to support behaviourist perspectives on procrastination.

First, a neuropsychological study investigating thirsty participants' intertemporal decision-making on drink delivery and consumption have used neuroimaging to conclude that when gratification is immediate, greater activity in the limbic reward area supersedes long-term preferences of the prefrontal cortex (McClure, Ericson, Laibson, Loewenstein, & Cohen, 2007). McClure et al.'s (2007) findings indicate that individuals' encounters with temptation seem to change their long-term reward in favour of the readily enjoyable moment. Thus, this study seems to offer a valuable neuroscientific perspective on procrastination from a non-academic context.

Second, Tice and Baumeister's (1997) longitudinal study compares procrastinating and non-procrastinating students' study behaviours. Their findings also highlight a preference for proximal gratification as students procrastinate with enjoyable activities when deadlines are remote. Albeit their study is susceptible to the above-mentioned limitations in the predominant procrastination research trends (see above: 2.1), which repeatedly recruit non-clinical student participants, Tice and Baumeister's findings suggest that procrastinating students report intense stress levels during assessment periods, more so than non-procrastinating students, and higher overall stress throughout the academic year. Yet, the implications of these findings seem to challenge behaviourist theory (e.g. Miller, 1944) on procrastination as the unpleasant and stressful scenario of last-minute task completion seems more rewarding, or insufficiently punishing, to prevent its reoccurrence.

When reviewing Miller's (1944) conflict behaviour theory, two predominant limitations seem particularly relevant. Firstly, Miller attributes concealed sources, most commonly described as fear, to drive approach-avoidance responses. When investigating conflict behaviour, he emphasises the need to unveil and identify its sources. Secondly, while Miller acknowledges the unique and ubiquitous influences on approach-avoidance, the theory seems to omit further exploration of these and maintains his behaviourist affiliation by attributing his theory to observable measures. This may seem perplexing as Miller's work is derived from Lewin's (1935) theory that emphasises individuals' inextricable relationship to their environment. This environment, according to Lewin, constitutes of both its physical form as well as our perception of it. This environment steers and evokes human behaviour (Lewin, 1935). Hence, psychological inquiries that divorce stimuli and response from their embedded environment, such as studies that utilise linear statistical methods or laboratory-based experiments, are likely to obscure as opposed to clarifying our understanding of human behaviour (Lewin, 1935). This seems interesting as contemporary procrastination research trends have picked up on behavioural constructs of procrastination (and approached accordingly in therapy) while important contextual influences remain largely unexplored. By contrast, recent qualitative studies in this field are increasingly emphasising the influences of contextual factors on procrastination (Grunschel et al., 2012; Klingsieck et al., 2013; Patrzek et al., 2012). The implication of this may highlight that linear or observable measures are limited in capturing the varied influences and aspects of procrastination.

In line with behavioural theory, however, affiliated therapeutic approaches aim to attain behavioural modification by targeting the triggers and reinforcers of procrastination

(Tuckman & Schouwenburg, 2004) through implementing techniques influenced by classical (Pavlov, 1927/1960) and operant conditioning (e.g. Skinner, 1938) theories. Strategies aligned with classical conditioning tend to target the triggers of procrastination, such as reducing distractions in clients' environment, whilst operant conditioning targets the reinforcers of procrastination; such as the perceived reward value in procrastination (Rozental & Carlbring, 2014; Schouwenburg, 2004a; Tuckman & Schouwenburg, 2004; Van Essen, Van den Heuvel, & Ossebaard, 2004). In behaviour therapy, breaking long-term goals up into shorter ones arguably increases the value in tasks with distal rewards as the client may experience a number of smaller gratifications along the way (Tuckman & Schouwenburg, 2004). Such explicit long- and short-term goal setting may be particularly well facilitated through clients' articulating their current needs and aspirations in life (Schouwenburg, 2004a). However, the extent to which it is possible to conduct such therapeutic dialogues without exploring clients' underlying beliefs and assumptions may be questioned.

In the past, psychologists have attempted to alter procrastination by implementing behavioural interventions that focus on, for instance, time management and study skills (Green, 1982; Richards, 1975; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). Although these components can be valuable in enhancing automaticity in an attempt to reduce the influences of distractions, Schouwenburg (2004b) highlights that these interventions are limited in getting to the bottom of the problem. In fact, behavioural theory and therapy is commonly critiqued for insufficiently considering the influences of other factors, such as cognitions and affect (Glick & Orsillo, 2015). As a result, approaches which rationalise the integration of behavioural and cognitive techniques have grown

increasingly popular when treating procrastination (e.g. Flett, Stainton, Hewitt, Sherry, & Lay, 2012; Rozental et al., 2015).

Cognitive-behavioural theories have made significant contributions in broadening our understanding of procrastination as a problem to be addressed in therapy. The cognitive-behavioural perspective on procrastination, as with any other disturbance, is underpinned by the presupposition that the behaviour is resultant of one's interpretations of a given situation or task (e.g. Dryden & Sabelus, 2010). Such cognitive attributions constitute of assumptions, core beliefs and negative automatic thoughts of a potentially irrational or unrealistic nature towards various aspects of the procrastinated task (Rozental & Carlbring, 2014). Hence, this theory immediately addresses some of the shortcomings of the behavioural perspectives by elaborating on the cognitions implied in procrastination.

The clinically informed seminal work of Ellis and Knaus (1977), offered from the rational-emotive strand of cognitive-behavioural theory, pioneered the field when offering a comprehensive framework for understanding and counselling procrastination. Their theory conceptualises procrastination as a dysfunctional behavioural response to anxiety-provoking beliefs that render individuals to perceive task-engagement as unpleasant (Ellis & Knaus, 1977). Ellis and Knaus attribute procrastination to three distinct irrational beliefs. Firstly, *self-downing beliefs* are characterised by individuals' aligning their sense of self-worth with their abilities and accomplishments. As poor evaluations or failure risk exposing one's inadequacy as a person, individuals procrastinate to eschew such risks (Ellis & Knaus, 1977). Secondly, *low frustration tolerance* (LFT) is described as beliefs regarding task-completion and

that it ought to be easy. Finally, Ellis and Knaus (1977) recognise that individuals may procrastinate as a passive expression of *hostile beliefs* regarding internal or external performance expectations. Ellis and Knaus highlight hostility as least associated with procrastination, interestingly this notion seems to resemble some of the psychodynamic constructs mentioned above.

Rorer (1983) critiques the abovementioned rational-emotive conceptualisations for being reductionist by over-emphasising task-related irrational beliefs as causing procrastination. He suggests that the behaviour could also emerge from secondary or tertiary consequences of completing the task. For instance, some procrastinate from consequences related to success, as post-graduation may face one with life's emptiness or evoke anxieties about meeting new people and forming relationships (Rorer, 1983). Thus, according to Rorer, the value in procrastinating is highlighted as graduating could evoke deep existential concerns and relational anxieties in individuals. This distinction has offered a more nuanced understanding of procrastination that seems to have particular clinical implications as this awareness could shift the therapeutic focus from the immediate problem (procrastination) to its secondary consequences (fear of success), this distinction can be of particular relevance in the therapeutic context.

In cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), above-mentioned behavioural interventions are coupled with strategies that target the influential unproductive cognitions in procrastination, (Pychyl & Flett, 2012). Overall, CBT approaches aim to relinquish procrastination through techniques that emphasise collaboration, psychoeducation and insight of distorted thinking (Schouwenburg et al., 2004). For instance, the REBT branch of CBT targets clients' irrational cognitions with more constructive ways of

thinking (e.g. Ellis & Knaus, 1977; Van Essen et al., 2004). REBT advocates for techniques that endeavour to identify, assess and dispute irrational beliefs within an ABC model of disturbance. According to this model, procrastination is a **C**onsequence of one's **B**eliefs regarding **A**nticipated cognitive, behavioural or emotional events (e.g. Dryden, 2000; Van Essen et al., 2004). Despite its popular utility (Schouwenburg et al., 2004), REBT can be critiqued for being rationalistically biased by oversimplifying the complexity of procrastination when implying that its resolution stems from rational action.

The CBT literature highlights some of the challenges when counselling procrastination. For example, Rorer (1983) emphasises the distinction between fear of failure and fear of success in therapy. Practitioners who associate “doing work” with a positive therapeutic outcome may collude with clients whom procrastination is underpinned by success-related fears (Rorer, 1983). Such performance bias on behalf of the counsellor may exacerbate clients' dilemma as *producing* work and *achieving* success underpin their distress (Rorer, 1983). This argument may also have implications for counselling with individuals who procrastinate as a form of rebelling against authority for having to do to work or meet deadlines.

The preference for cognitive-behavioural or behavioural approaches to procrastination treatment in academia (Schouwenburg et al., 2004) may seem reasonable considering the time-pressured and performance-driven context in which procrastination counselling regularly takes place (see Chapter One: 1.2). It seems reasonable to implement a less explorative and more structured treatment approach that aims to equip students with some skills to manage their procrastination, which they can autonomously

implement beyond counselling termination, instead of therapeutic approaches that require them to embark on an introspective journey, which may make one enfeebled for some time (e.g. Birner, 1993). Cook (2000) suggests that counsellors' aetiology of procrastination determines the approach they adopt. However, while the university counselling context is known to offer its practitioners flexibility in the therapeutic approaches they implement (RCP, 2011), it remains unclear how university counsellors understand and therapeutically work with procrastination, or why certain interventions are chosen. As treatment effectiveness (see below: 2.6) or its preceding therapeutic processes in this field are wholly unexplored, a great deal of uncertainty surrounds the real life provision of counselling to procrastinating students. The next section seeks to highlight some of the issues that have led to the rationale of the presently proposed study.

2.5 Alternative Approaches

As illustrated above, psychodynamic, behavioural and cognitive-behavioural approaches seem most popular when attempting to understand and effectively treat procrastination in therapeutic contexts. To critically evaluate research trends in this field and highlight a more integrated conceptualisation of procrastination, alternative approaches to understanding and treating procrastination are reviewed here.

As noted above (see: 2.2), predominant research trends construct procrastination as self-regulation failure. However, as procrastination is known to create more stress, greater anxiety and higher negative mood levels (Stead et al., 2010) Sirois and Pychyl (2013), elaborate on this construct when investigating the intra-personal processes, including underlying stressors and negative feelings, which evoke procrastination. In a

subsequent study, Sirois (2014) proposes a relationship between procrastination and negative self-judgements, or a lack of self-compassion. Findings from their study highlight that this negative self-experience contributes to the heightened stress that has been recognised among procrastinating individuals (e.g. Stead et al., 2010). Further, Sirois (2014) argues that low levels of self-compassion may have further negative consequences associated with worry and self-blame in a way that resembles rumination. While Sirois (2014) highlights that rumination and worry are commonly treated with CBT, she recommends interventions aimed at enhancing self-compassion as particularly effective in increasing individuals' self-regulation. According to Sirois (2014) research indicates that interventions that increase self-compassion can enable people to see their part in negative events, such as failing to act timely on intentions, rather than becoming entangled with the unhelpful cognitions that promote procrastination. Accordingly, interventions that increase self-compassion may be beneficial to reduce the negative states that promote short-term reward in imminent distractions by disengaging with an intended task (Sirois, 2014).

Furthermore, a study by Zuroff and associates (2000) postulates that self-critical individuals are less associated with social support networks. Thus, an intervention that offers this could be particularly valuable. As an effective intervention, the therapeutic alliance has shown to facilitate outcome in several forms of psychotherapy (Zuroff et al., 2000). Earlier work, primarily from Rogers's (1957) theorising, documents the therapeutic relationship and therapist's ability to provide appropriate conditions for therapeutic change (Zuroff et al., 2000). Roger's (e.g. 1957) person-centred approach has become a well-established and empirically supported form of counselling and psychotherapy (cited in Davis-McCabe & Winthrop, 2010). It is distinct in its belief in

each individual's fundamental tendency towards growth. The purpose of person-centred therapy is to foster the conditions under which this tendency can evolve. At its most basic, Roger emphasises that therapist and client are in psychological contact with one another, as the approach is a way of being rather than a set of techniques. As the actualising tendency promotes growth, differentiation and autonomy, its suitability with procrastination seems implied.

While Zuroff et al. (2000) recognise the suitability of a person-centred approach; they add that an integrative skillset is required to encourage active involvement in the therapeutic process when helping clients to overcome self-criticism. For instance, procrastination from a lack of self-compassions may be best treated with interventions that target this negative self-experience. Meanwhile, a number of psychologists emphasise that therapists who offer counselling for procrastinating individuals ought to be able to draw on a number of therapeutic modalities (Ferrari et al., 1995) and a range of approaches are outlined in Schouwenburg et al. (2004). These interventions are mostly implemented with a group of procrastinators, which utilise cognitive and behavioural components to their approaches. Less conventional therapies are also included, such as a narrative method of helping procrastinating students (O'Callaghan, 2004), constructive confrontation approaches with certain underachievers (Mandel, 2004), for example.

Most recently, it seems that researchers are increasingly focusing on internet-based approaches (Glick & Orsillo, 2015; Rozental & Carlbring, 2013; Topman et al., 2004). While computer-based interventions is a current issue in the field of CoP research, as it seems to be increasingly utilised in the UK (Davis-McCabe & Winthrop, 2010). While

computerised self-help can be an innovative way to support procrastinating individuals in HE, due to being cost effective and offering options to students who do not want face-to-face support (Davis-McCabe & Winthrop, 2010). However, as with the other treatment options outlined thus far in this chapter, its effectiveness is yet to be established.

2.6 Treatment Effectiveness and its Relevance to This Research

Contemporary procrastination research seems to place an increased focus on treatment (Dryden, 2012; Glick & Orsillo, 2015; Rozental & Carlbring, 2014); yet, the efficacy of approaches appears generally not well established. The scarce research in this aspect of procrastination treatment will be the focus of this section of the thesis. As mentioned in the literature review, treatment effectiveness studies are largely unexplored. The sole meta-analysis conducted on treatment efficacy was offered by Ferrari et al. (1995) with findings showing minimal effectiveness. According to Klingsieck et al. (2013), the review's marginal effect seems mediated by the notion that procrastination is yet to be universally conceptualised. Hence, it is argued that intervention outcomes may be compromised as the current understanding of procrastination is continuously developing; thus, it is not clear exactly what it is that is being therapeutically addressed. Klingsieck et al. (2013) call for new research measures which amplify the voices of those who are struggling with procrastination. Though this is considered a relevant, novel approach it may fall short in that its limitations are comparable to those attributed to pre-existing quantitative research; namely, the ongoing endeavour to identify the precursors of procrastination through individuals' self-reports of procrastination.

Treatment effectiveness has also received mixed results in Schouwenburg et al.'s (2004) work. To establish evidence-based counselling effectiveness and increase research validity in this aspect of the field, Klingsieck et al. call for studies which include greater group sizes; and randomised, controlled, double-blind placebo trials (2013). Such randomised controlled trials are a widely used approach to assess effectiveness in counselling and psychotherapy research (Rowland & Goss, 2000). However, McLeod (2000) challenges the validity of such methods by suggesting that their findings overestimate treatment effectiveness whilst producing data which is difficult to interpret accurately; as the data may differ depending on treatment approach and at what stage of therapy measures are deployed (McCleod, 2000). Given the inherent challenges of examining therapeutic processes, particularly with phenomenon that are not clearly conceptualised in the research, hence, a qualitative approach may be a more appropriate step towards understanding treatment and its effectiveness in this field.

Qualitative studies exploring clients' accounts, or their therapists' perceptions, of treatment and its progress are deemed particularly suitable for outcome research in the psychotherapeutic paradigm (McLeod, 2000). Treatment efficacy appears preceded by an accurate understanding of procrastination; hence, investigating a different perspective to attain such understanding, one described as particularly information-rich in this context by Patrzek et al. (2012), has thus motivated the current research. That is, giving voice to the university counsellors who work therapeutically with this issue.

Research indicates that practitioners' understandings and attributions may have strong influences on the therapeutic approach and outcome; however, these aspects of

counselling procrastination appear largely unexplored. The pioneering study conducted by Patrzek et al. (2012) utilised a focus group to explore university counsellors' perspectives on procrastination and rationalised such enquiry as highly insightful when seeking to investigate procrastination treatment. Arguably, their qualitative approach may have been limited when narrowing down their inquiry to participants' perspectives on the antecedents and consequences of procrastinators. Hence, it could be perceived that their study did not give room for the emergence of unexpected aspects of participants' experiences, or their subjectivity, to emerge.

While treatment effectiveness in this field is yet to be established. Many have postulated that, regardless of approach, the most important element to any therapeutic encounter is that of the therapeutic relationship. Yet, research on the therapeutic relationship when counselling procrastination remains unexplored. Given that CoP places great emphasis on the importance of the therapeutic relationship with regards to positive therapeutic outcomes (e.g. Douglas et al. 2016). While it would be interesting to explore university counsellors' experiences of the therapeutic relationship with procrastinating students, it is recognised that different counsellors may view and place more, or less, emphasis on the therapeutic relationship. Thus, rather than imposing the value of the therapeutic relationship, as important to the researcher (see reflexivity) on to the participants, it was considered more valuable to remain open and curious about whether this notion would emerge in participants' accounts.

2.7 Rationale for This Research

This literature review has aimed to demonstrate the findings of extant research on procrastination that are of relevance to counselling psychologists who may encounter this issue in their practice. The therapeutic literature on procrastination suggests that there are significant challenges to the work; whilst treatment effectiveness is little documented. Previous research has predominantly sought to define procrastination in terms of its antecedents and consequences. The literature is mainly formed upon quantitative studies with research findings offering correlational data based upon repeatedly utilised standardised, self-report questionnaires. Meanwhile, there is a dearth of qualitative research. Thus, it appears to have become generally accepted that the best or sometimes the only way to measure procrastination is to apply standardised measures on the predecessors and consequences of the behaviour.

Counsellors' direct experiences of working with this issue, in this context, are almost completely unexplored. Exploring the nature of this work and investigating these practitioners' experiences could give valuable insight into important aspects of the therapeutic process; such as the perceived impact of this client group on the practitioner, and the way in which they experience and manage this area of their practice. Systematically investigating the perspectives of this participant group is deemed particularly important by Patrzek et al. (2012) who attribute these individuals as information-rich sources in procrastination treatment. However, their experiences of the therapeutic process when treating procrastination have remained unexplored. Arguably, conducting an empirical study with this participant group meets the need of extending the research in this field, which in turn creates new directions for future

inquiry. In turn, these new lines of insight can pave the way for more effective treatment interventions.

When reviewing extant literature on HE and procrastination, it is striking how absent CoP sources are in the field. Reading quantitative studies which utilise non-counselling populations to measure single constructs of procrastination may not appear highly applicable to the counselling psychologist's work. As CoP researchers seek to address real-world issues faced by its practitioners in the field and seeing that counselling psychologists work in this field, this study, therefore, seeks to meet the extant need to produce knowledge that CoP practitioners can use; derived from counsellors' current clinical practice in this context. Hence, this study sets out to meet the QAA requirement for CoP qualification which advises that original, applicable knowledge is produced for the professional discipline (Kasket, 2012).

2.8 The Aims and Objectives of This Research

This research aims to provide an insider's view to how procrastination is perceived and managed therapeutically; as such contributing to a gap in the extant literature. By adopting an IPA approach exploring their experiences, it is hoped that the study will provide a valuable insight into the first-hand accounts of counsellors directly working with this client group. The interpretative and phenomenological nature of IPA will offer an in-depth exploration of these individuals' approach to this presenting problem, their involvement within the therapy, and their meaning-making of this.

By attaining an in-depth insider perspective of these counsellors, useful information may surface in relation to the psychological treatment of procrastination. These insights

may have some bearing on how treatment efficacy can be increased. It is hoped that this study will present findings which have given considerable time, thought, and emphasis to the relevance and applicability of CoP practice; further, giving primary consideration to the counselling psychologist and other practitioners who currently work in the HE context.

In line with the research aims to provide an insider perspective on this under-researched topic, the research question of this study is:

How do university counsellors understand and experience working therapeutically with procrastination as a presenting problem?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

3.1 Overview of Chapter Three

This chapter will firstly address the rationale for choosing a qualitative paradigm and explain why IPA and its epistemology is the most appropriate analytic approach to answering the research question: *“how do university counsellors understand and experience working therapeutically with procrastination as a presenting problem?”* Secondly, the ethically appropriate method used to recruit participants and collect data is presented followed by an outline of the steps used to analyse the data that have formed the results illustrated in Chapter Four. Finally, this chapter considers some issues relating to quality in qualitative research, of relevance to the present study, as well as the researcher’s reflexivity.

3.2 Choosing an Analytical Approach

This research aims to explore how university counsellors understand and work with procrastination in the HE context. Alternative methodologies have been considered and are briefly evaluated here to argue for why IPA has been the chosen analytic approach. For example, it was considered important to use an approach that would remain open to the potential variety of perspectives and complexities encompassed in the lived experience of working with students’ procrastination, as noted within the literature review (Chapter Two). A bottom-up qualitative approach thus seemed most appropriate to capture “what it is like” (Willig, 2013, p.8) to work therapeutically with procrastinating students in an academic setting. Different qualitative approaches were also considered for this research. However, IPA was deemed most appropriate, as outlined here.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis ([FDA], Foucault, 1987; 1990a; 1990b) could have been a possible method of inquiry. Two strands could have been explored: firstly, how participants' understanding of procrastination positions them in relation to discursive power structures that permeate social, political and organisational contexts. Secondly, an FDA could have identified the dominant norms that implicitly influence the counsellor-student dynamic. As Abramowski (2014) suggests, such norms may be visible in moral binary discourses of normal/abnormal or appropriate/problematic behaviour that send covert messages to students that procrastination is pathological and ought to be alleviated. Understanding these norms and power structures could help to clarify how individuals' behaviour seems regulated in relation to the university's panoptical surveillance (e.g. Foucault, 1987) of students private study practices. Although useful, the aforementioned FDA approach was not adopted as it could not address the realities of individuals' experiential accounts regarding their understandings and meanings of procrastination, which may have real implications for therapeutic practice.

Grounded Theory ([GT], Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was also considered as a methodology for the present study. GT aims to develop a theoretical account that is grounded in the participant material by grouping data incorporating "incidents, events and happenings" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990:6) into conceptual categories. Amongst these categories relationships are identified to grasp the social processes that are theoretically associated with a core category. However, as GT's main aim is to produce a theory of social categories of meaning; it was considered inappropriate for this proposed study which was interested in mapping out the key

themes about counselling the procrastinating student in academia. The idiographic and phenomenological nature of the present study, which set out to explore how this particular group make sense of their experiences, therefore considered Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) the most appropriate methodology.

3.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA's influences are firmly rooted in phenomenology, ideography and hermeneutics (J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). To illustrate why IPA was the chosen methodology for the current study, this section will highlight how these three theoretical underpinnings lend themselves to address the above research question.

Firstly, phenomenology is a philosophical approach which lends itself to several nuanced ways of thinking about personal subjective experiencing as, for instance, a shared interest among phenomenologists emphasises a curiosity about what a "lived experience" is like and how it can be understood (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p.11). Phenomenology is of particular relevance and value to this study in that it offers ways of thinking about how to examine and understand participants' experiences. The following quote by Husserl describes the phenomenological approach:

"When we are fully engaged in conscious activity, we focus exclusively on the specific thing, thoughts, values, goals, or means involved, but not on the psychological experience as such, only reflection reveals this to us. Through reflection...we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become conscious of them, in which...they 'appear'" (Husserl, cited in J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p.13)

As highlighted in this quote, Husserl's phenomenological philosophy have set out that an enhanced understanding of lived experience is enabled through examining or reflecting on psychological processes such as consciousness, awareness and perception (in J. A. Smith et al., 2009). While Husserl's phenomenology has been concerned with finding the essence of human experience, the ambition of IPA is perhaps more modest by attempting to capture the experiences of a specific group of people, positioned in a particular context (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). This notion aligns itself with Heidegger's phenomenology, which emphasises that individuals are an indelible part of their sociocultural and historical contexts (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

The abovementioned processes of examining and reflecting can be further understood through Heidegger's ideas on *Dasein*, or "there-being", which set out to establish the fundamental nature of "human being" (in J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p.16). Exploring how an individual acts and engages in the world, according to Heidegger, can enable a subsequent understanding of individuals' meaning-making within a specific experience of a particular phenomenon (in J. A. Smith et al., 2009). This emphasis on phenomenology applies to this study and its interest to explore university counsellors' perspectives on working with procrastinating students in HE. Through listening to how these participants understand procrastination and how they deal with it in therapy, one can become aware of the meanings these counsellors attribute to these concepts and get closer to the lived experience of counselling procrastination in HE.

This concept of *Dasein* also applies to the researcher who, like the participants, is an active agent in a lived world (e.g. J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Of relevance to this study, that can apply to how the researcher understands or makes sense of procrastination,

which may be similar or different to their participants. As both the participants and researcher are an indelible part of their contexts, this infers that the researcher's analysis of participants' accounts is inevitably one of many possible subjective interpretations (Willig, 2013). Thus, when interpreting participants' data appropriate steps must be taken to minimise the researcher's subjectivity, as acknowledged in the theory of interpretation (see also researcher's reflexivity below: 3.5.3).

The second central component of IPA is the study of interpretation, namely hermeneutics. In attempting to phenomenologically enter the participant's world, an IPA study offers a twice removed or double hermeneutic account. During the interview, participants' attempts to make sense of their experiences of procrastination are one interpretation while the researcher's attempt to make sense of the data is the second interpretation (Larkin et al., 2006; J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The possibility of multiple hermeneutic layers emphasises the need for both continual researcher reflexivity on the process of data analysis and maintaining an awareness of how the researcher's own fore-understandings (J. A. Smith et al., 2009) of procrastination may influence particular interpretations. By acknowledging their own influences and biases regarding procrastination, the researcher endeavours to "bracket off" their own assumption (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). This attempt to enter the participant's world and get as close as possible to their perspective is known as empathic hermeneutics (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). Additionally, through a questioning hermeneutic the researcher relies more on their interpretations of what the participant indirectly may be saying (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008). By combining these two, an IPA attempts to, as closely as possible, convey a true understanding of the participant's world (J. A. Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Finally, an IPA study also adheres to idiography. This is evident in the researcher's commitment to the particular, firstly, by focusing on a homogenous cohort (e.g. university counsellors) and their specific experiences of a phenomenon (e.g. counselling procrastination) in a particular context (e.g. academic settings) and, secondly, by aiming to elicit an nuanced and detailed understanding of participants' accounts. This level of depth means that the sample size does not have to be large to obtain a comprehensive understanding of an experience (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), an exploration of the particular with a homogenous group may bring one closer to the general as a depth of understanding across individual participants can generate themes that, to some extent, can relate to the group that these participants may represent.

Overall, the aim of IPA is to produce an interpretative account that is true to the participants' covert and overt narratives. IPA was, therefore, the chosen methodology as these aims were in line with those of this research, to attain valuable insights into the first-hand experiences of university counsellors.

3.3.1 The epistemological stance of this research

Qualitative research is concerned with epistemology, namely, debates relating to the nature of knowledge and how this is acquired (Coyle, 2007; Willig, 2013). To demonstrate quality and clarity in qualitative research, such studies are required to state their ontological (how things are) and epistemological (how knowledge is conceptualised) positions (Willig, 2013). Hence, this section will outline the epistemological considerations that inform this study.

Ontology addresses one's assumptions along with a spectrum of realism and relativism (Willig, 2013). According to Willig (2001), a realist perspective maintains that “*the world is made up of structures and objects that have cause-effect relationships with one another*” (p.13). The dominant empirical research approaches to studying procrastination in terms of its causes and correlates (see Chapter Two: 2.2) is in keeping with this realist perspective. Such studies, for example, highlight an ontology that assumes a fixed notion of what procrastination is.

Realist perspectives have been challenged by a more relativist ontology that constructs reality as depending on its originating contexts. As explained by Madill, Jordan and Shirley (2000) this perspective reflects perspectives that construct individuals as interpretative beings with subjective context-dependent viewpoints. Thus, by contrast to a realist perspective, relativism subscribes to a less organised or structured worldview that comprises of one's perceptions and interpretations (Willig, 2001). In the context of this study, for example, a relativist perspective could allow for participants different attributions and meanings to emerge.

Both realist and relativist perspectives inform this research, a positioning known as *critical realism* (Ponterotto, 2005; Willig, 2013), which can be described as:

“that [which] maintains a central focus on the ways in which people make meaning of their experience, whilst being aware of the influences that broader social structures have on those meanings” (Willig, as quoted in Lawthom & Tindall, 2011, p.9).

As noted above, a critical realist epistemology takes account of both individual meaning and social context (Lawthom & Tindall, 2011). This acknowledges that procrastination and its related experiences are real concepts that exist in the real world, or an external reality, whilst also recognising how its reported meanings are mediated by the wider contextual influences in which these associations are situated. Given the different meanings attributed to this notion of procrastination, including how it may (or may not) be effectively helped and how these concepts may differ from one person to another, a critical realist epistemology may capture these different meanings while also critically examining the influences from their embedded context.

Thus, it is argued, that a critical realist stance can enable a deeper and more meaningful account on procrastination, which includes a consideration of the possible effects of these participants' particular perspectives for university counsellors and HE counselling services more widely.

3.4 Method

This section will outline how this research was conducted; considering ethics, participant recruitment, interview procedure, and subsequent steps taken when analysing data from the ten interviews.

3.4.1 Ethics

The University of Roehampton's ethical committee granted full ethical approval (Appendix 1) for the study prior to the commencement of participant recruitment. Additionally, its conduct adhered to the BPS (2014) ethical guidelines. Before each interview, the ethical procedures were as follows: for participants to provide informed

and valid consent, an information sheet (Appendix 2) was designed to furnish prospective participants with details about the research study and their potential participation including their right to withdraw participation. For confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher informed participants that any identifying details gathered would be kept secure while interview recordings, transcripts, and associated analysis would be stored separately on a password-enabled laptop. Participant pseudonyms were developed to maintain anonymity and, as far as possible, all identifying information removed or altered. All these documents would be destroyed once the research and its examination were fully completed.

Ahead of the interview, participants were emailed a consent form (Appendix 3) to allow familiarisation with the hard copy they would be asked to sign prior to commencing the interview. Participants had opportunities to express potential concern or questions before giving written consent. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw during the interview, or subsequent to by stating their unique ID number provided on their consent form wherefrom all their data would be destroyed. On completion of each interview, a debrief sheet was given to participants (Appendix 4). Considering their expertise, the researcher did not wish to patronise participants by including a list of available support services in case of distress. Instead, interviews ended with a verbal debriefing to monitor any adverse emotional consequences and to, once again, invite potential questions.

3.4.2 Recruitment and inclusion/exclusion criteria

Following ethical approval, UK university counselling services were telephoned to enable the introduction of the researcher and enquire about recruitment possibilities.

Services were emailed (see Appendix 5) if no telephone contact was established. Subject to approval, the information sheet (Appendix 2) was emailed to either the service manager or their administrator, which was subsequently circulated amongst the prospective counsellors who could then contact the researcher directly.

As recommended by Smith et al. (2009), the sample should be limited to those who have likely insight into the specific research topic. The recruitment criteria thus stipulated that qualified counsellors, who had experience of counselling students' procrastination problems, could participate. Albeit university counsellors are known to have varied training backgrounds and approaches to therapy (e.g. RCP, 2011), given that professionals were asked to volunteer participation, all qualified counsellors were invited to participate to avoid recruitment restrictions. While a variance in modalities may have influenced how participants thought, and made sense, of their experiences, their lived experience of counselling procrastination was at the forefront of the investigation it was considered that the inclusion criteria would result in a satisfactorily homogenous sample. All counsellors, coincidentally, identified as working integratively. Finally, potential participants' suitability for inclusion was ascertained by email prior to arranging the research interview.

3.4.3 Participants

In line with IPA's idiographic focus (J. A. Smith et al., 2009) this study recruited ten participants. One additional participant was recruited for pilot interviewing purposes only. Maintaining the anonymity of the participants was of upmost importance in this study. Due to the potential degree of networking amongst university counsellors, which is a relatively small group of practitioners compared to those working in an NHS

setting, the demographic information presented in Table 1 (below) has taken that in mind; aiming to provide the reader with information about the participants without compromising the confidentiality of the partaking individuals. The absence of demographic information may be a point of critique; however, it can be emphasised that the aim of this research was to explore the experience of participants, not the interaction between experience and variables such as years of experience, ethnicity, gender, or age. Such demographic information might be investigated in a research study of quantitative nature.

Participants had a variety of training backgrounds which had been accumulated over their years of practice; all had different extents of knowledge in different therapeutic modalities. The participants had a variety of previous work experiences apart from two who had always worked within the university counselling context.

Table 1: Participant information

Gender	Current orientation	Year Qualified	Years in HE	Sessions offered	Location
Female	Integrative	1998	16	6	Greater London
Female	Integrative/CBT	2007	2	6	Greater London
Female	Integrative/ psychodynamic	2007	2	6 ext. 12	Greater London
Female	Integrative	1994	7	6	Greater London
Male	Integrative	1992	22	6	Greater London
Female	Integrative	1994	10	6	Greater London
Male	Integrative/ Solution-Focus	1994	10	6	South-East
Male	Integrative	1999	10	6 ext.<	Greater London
Male	Integrative	1982	21	6 ext. 12	Mid-West
Female	Integrative/CBT	1996	18	6	Greater London

3.4.4 Interview schedule & pilot study

In line with IPA requirements (J. A. Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2013), semi-structured interviews were carried out to gain insight into participants' viewpoints, claims and concerns. In accordance with Smith et al.'s (2009) guidelines, an interview schedule was developed, aimed to spark a deep and personal dialogue. The initial questions were intended for the participant to provide a general account of their experience, creating a researcher-participant rapport. Subsequently the researcher asked follow up questions intended to elicit in-depth answers that tapped into participants' specific experiences. Each open-ended question had a number of probes to prompt participants to elaborate where appropriate.

On attaining ethical approval, a pilot interview was conducted to evaluate the interview schedule. Subsequently, minor amendments were made to the ordering and formulation of some questions. Subsequent to the pilot interview, changes were made to the layout of the interview schedule, the sequence of some questions was slightly altered and the initially high number of prompts was reduced. A final interview schedule was then drafted covering the areas:

- How 'procrastination' was understood, as derived from their practice
- Their ways of working with this presenting issue
- How, if any, they experienced change brought about.
- Specific training needs or recommendations for procrastination intervention

3.4.5 Data analysis

When analysing the data, the researcher closely followed the steps as outlined by Smith et al. (2009) and Willig (2013). Complementary techniques offered by Gee (2011) were also utilised. An overview of the steps taken is outlined below:

- 1) Each interview was transcribed verbatim, entailing semantic transcription of all utterances, pauses, and non-verbal communications. For ease of reference, lines and pages were numbered (as seen in Appendix 7).
- 2) To assure accuracy, commence an engagement with the data and entering the participant's world, each transcript was repeatedly read whilst listening to the audio recording of the original encounter. Thus enhancing familiarity with participants' accounts as their linguistic inflections were recalled in subsequent readings.
- 3) The next step entailed initial interpretative notes on each transcript where a line-by-line inspection highlighted the content of participants' accounts. Transcripts were analysed with a particular focus on descriptive (phenomenological), linguistic, and conceptual (increasingly interpretative) aspects of the narrative. All exploratory comments made in the right-hand margin of the transcript using different colour pens to signify the nature of the commentary. These annotations were written by hand, and a scanned example is provided in Appendix 7.
- 4) The next step in the analysis was concerned with developing emerging themes which were entered in the left-hand column margin of the transcript (also seen in Appendix 7). Here, the researcher worked primarily within the exploratory commentary rather than the transcript itself. This process was aimed to explore the psychological and conceptual content of the chunks of raw data.

- 5) Subsequently, the analysis sought to find connections between the emergent themes which were entered chronologically onto a separate table with key words from the raw data to aid researcher's recollection of the basis of the theme (see Table 2 below)

Table 2: Some emerging themes with key words for one participant (see Appendix 8 for all emerging themes from this transcript)

Emerging Theme	Page/Line	Key words
Challenging to work with stuckness	1. 29-31	You kind of think 'just do it.'
identifying what lies behind the P	2. 2-3	It's avoidance, so what are they avoiding
disorganised P may have direct solution	2. 12-14	Just give them an activity schedule
Some cases are more serious	2. 18-20	Then there is a bigger issue
Deep, reflective & existential approach	2.26-28	Get them think about what their life is like
Prefer/ easier with anxiety/energetic P	3.1-5	There is ... motivation to get things done
Identify volition to enable help	3.10-19	Whether they want to...
Utility in approach, between doing and avoiding	4.11-16	See how it has gone...difference it has made...intervention that you can just see...

- 6) Each emergent theme was then transferred to a separate post-it note to aid their movement and clustering towards the creation of potential master themes. Smith et al. (2009) recommend various ways to look for patterns and connections amongst the emergent themes in the transcript, such as “abstraction” or “subsumption” (p.97) to mention a couple of strategies that were particularly helpful in this IPA. The table with the emergent themes listed in chronological order was then revised as the themes were rearranged and grouped together under the respective superordinate theme (Table 3).

Table 3: Initial cluster of some themes for one participant

Initial cluster of some themes for one participant	
<p>Understanding - can't be generalised Different reasons for P Different emotional underlying causes P not one 'thing' Same behaviour but for different reasons TR varies depending on type of P</p> <p>Deep-rooted Procrastination Some cases are more serious When P deep-rooted/developmental, brief therapy may be insufficient Chaotic past /Unsettled/un-soothed child</p> <p>Anxious Procrastination P as fearful task appraisal</p> <p>Disorganised Procrastination disorganised P may have a direct solution</p> <p>Reflection on change Prefer/ easier with anxiety/energetic P Change is simple /not rocket science Change from relational meeting Change: emphasis on underlying reason</p> <p>Challenge – working in brief model Describing work as trial to therapy Time pressure & quick pacing in therapy</p>	<p>Strategy – practical approach Utility in approach, between doing and avoiding Doing approach</p> <p>Strategy – promote insight/challenge comfort in P Facing P can come be to unpleasant Comfort in P /manage student's anxiety Short term relief/benefit - neglect leads to long term pain/problem Promote insight when P offers relief</p> <p>Strategy – reframe negative to positive/promote insight Problem account unhelpful/re-name/re-frame it</p> <p>Relational/existential approach reflective & existential approach</p> <p>Challenge – deep rooted P / slow progress Challenging to work with stuckness Counsellor to manage their expectations Change: Seeing reason and consequences Exhausting to work with stuckness Preference to work with anxiety driven frustration with student stuckness Identify volition to enable help Challenge their resistance Use of congruence to help move stuck</p>

7) The same steps were followed for each transcript. In keeping with IPA's idiographic commitment the researcher attempted, as far as possible, to approach each new interview with ideas from previously analysed transcripts bracketed. This would allow new themes to emerge from each transcript (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Finally, connections were made across cases, and a final group table of themes was created illustrating master themes encapsulating superordinate themes and the recurrence of themes for each participant. Table 4 outlines an example of one final master theme.

Table 4: Master Theme 2 and subthemes.

Master Theme 2
Deskilled Procrastination
Subthemes
De-skilled style of procrastination Therapeutic solutions for deskilled style Skill specific changes

As will be presented in Chapter Four, one of the main findings from conducting these analytic steps was the emergence of different procrastination “styles”. To clarify, this notion refers to a distinct experiential presentation of procrastination as reported by these participants, regarding the causes for problems of studying. Styles are particular ways of describing the nexus thinking and feeling patterns that may underlie procrastinating behaviour; in other words, the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ understanding of the presenting problem. In turn, each style seemed to require distinct therapeutic interventions, as described by these participants.

3.5 Validity and Quality

Writers such as Yardley (2000) have developed criteria employed to assess good quality in qualitative research. To demonstrate quality in the present study; the current section will highlight consideration taken of Yardley’s four general criteria and how these apply to IPA research.

3.5.1 Sensitivity to context

This first criterion can be variously addressed in qualitative research (Yardley, 2000). Smith et al. (2009) highlighted three ways that sensitivity to context can be applied to an IPA study. First, by purposively selecting participants which demonstrate sensitivity to context and the methodology's commitment to the particular; second, through the ethical conduct of data collection and presentation of transcript extracts in the results which seek to give participants voice; and finally by demonstrating an awareness of the diversity of literature relevant to the research topic.

This idiographic focus highly influenced the researcher in the current study, as the aim of the research was to look at procrastination from a different, therapeutic perspective. University counsellors were considered ideal candidates to share their expertise and insights of therapeutic processes when seeking to answer the given research question. It could be suggested that the variance in the theoretical orientations and extents of the practitioners' experiences may compromise the homogeneity of this cohort. However, the researcher deliberated that such variance may be considered appropriate in meeting the idiographic commitment of an IPA study.

3.5.2 Commitment to rigour of interpretation, transparency and coherence

Yardley's (2000) reference to commitment relates to the researcher's efforts to meet the abovementioned criteria in a highly attentive and sensitive manner. Conducting those aspects as well as the write-up stages of the research with high levels of care addresses Yardley's criterion relating to rigour. A well-conducted interview in IPA, which elicits rich and meaning-full data, is indicative of the consistent and skilful management of interviews wherein participants are highly attended to and probed to

elaborate (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Subsequently, a requirement for good IPA studies is a rigorously carried out analysis that demonstrates a balance between the descriptive with the interpretative, and the idiographic with the generic within the themes (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The latter poses researchers with another opportunity to illustrate the part-whole relationship of the hermeneutic circle as there is a consistent demonstration of participants' narratives in the analysis that illuminates individual participants' shared experiences with the experiences of the group as a whole within the themes (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). This cyclic process was prominent throughout the analysis despite describing the analytic procedure in a linear manner in section 3.4.5.

The criterion of transparency and coherence relates to the researcher's attempt to be open about the steps and procedures taken in designing and conducting their research (Yardley, 2000). As per Smith et al.'s (2009) recommendation, this research aims to achieve such transparency through outlining the analytic steps, including tables to detail various features of the research process, and researcher's reflexivity. The practice of reflexivity has been encouraged when demonstrating research validity (Finlay, 2003; Yardley, 2000). This process requires that researchers reflect on their inextricable involvement with the researched (Finlay & Gough, 2003). Hence, reflexivity is considered vital due to the growing emphasis on researcher subjectivity in qualitative research (Finlay, 2003; Finlay & Gough, 2003; Shaw, 2010). Perhaps as it sparks a debate about the interpretative ontology which regards reality as a co-construction between individuals and their world (Shaw, 2010). These intersubjective ideas, and the double hermeneutic element of IPA, particularly strengthen the crucial role of researcher reflexivity as interpretation plays such a vital role in IPA.

In an attempt to demonstrate the implications of my preconceived ideas, beliefs, and experiences on this study I aim to demonstrate an ongoing reflexive thinking process wherever relevant.

3.5.3 Researcher's reflexivity

IPA highlights that the researcher inevitably sees and interprets the participants' world through a personal lens (Smith et al., 2009). In this section, I will discuss the more personal influences that may have affected this study including, for the sake of transparency, my reasons for choosing this research topic (Yardley, 2000).

I am a female with Middle-Eastern heritage, I grew up in Sweden, and at the time of the interviews, I was 29 years of age. A number of personal experiences led me to this topic as the subject of my research. The first time I came across the term *procrastination* was in the final year of my undergraduate degree when instructed to write a quantitative research report on procrastination. At the time, there was no direct translation of this term in my first language, Swedish. Thus it was the first time I came across this word, and it was with great relief I could get myself familiar with some of the research on this topic of procrastination, a term with which I closely identified. While the outcome of that assignment enabled me to identify that "procrastination" is a widely prevailing problem, it left me with a curiosity about learning more about this seemingly complex issue.

Subsequent in-depth reflection on my experiences drew my awareness to the unconscious driving forces that influenced the focus of this research. Through reflexivity I came to understand that whilst I initially positioned myself within the

academic context as a student who identified with procrastination problems, this research was perhaps initially and unconsciously motivated by an attempt to reposition myself into a more comfortable role of a researcher or a future counselling psychologist helping clients with this “difficult” problem. I was possibly driven by a desire to gain professional input into how to overcome this issue (and prevent it from affecting the progression of my thesis). It is clear to see how this was based on my own experiences with procrastination at a time when I had not fully gained perspective or processed my own experiences (see Chapter Five).

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter presents the interpretative phenomenological analysis that was conducted on ten university counsellor participants' accounts to address the research question: *“how do university counsellors understand and experience working therapeutically with procrastination as a presenting problem?”* Four master themes have been identified that highlight, firstly, contextual challenges these participants reported while working in university settings. The subsequent three master themes offer distinct styles of procrastination which seem to require diverse therapeutic approaches. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that these findings represent one interpretative reading of many possible.

Table 5: Master and subthemes

Master Theme 1	Master Theme 2	Master Theme 3	Master Theme 4	
4.1 General Contextual Challenges	4.2. De-skilled Procrastination	4.3 Anxious/fearful Procrastination	4.4 Conflictual Procrastination	
Subthemes				
4.1.1 Institutional pressures	4.2.1 De-skilled style of procrastination	4.3.1 Procrastination as fear-fuelled	4.4.1 Procrastination as resistance practice	4.4.2 Procrastination as self-punitive
4.1.2 Dilemmas of short-term work	4.2.2 Therapeutic solutions for de-skilled procrastination	4.3.2 Therapeutic solution for anxious/fearful procrastination	4.4.3 Therapeutic solution for conflictual procrastination	
	4.2.3 Skill-specific changes	4.3.3 Change by reappraisals of their practices	4.4.4. Experiencing students' resistance and reflections on change	

4.1 Master Theme 1: General Contextual Challenges

This first master theme highlights the general contextual challenges participants reported when counselling the procrastinating students in academic settings. The two constituent subthemes firstly illustrate the experienced pressures from working in these institutional settings and, secondly, the dilemmas faced when working within a brief therapeutic model.

4.1.1 Institutional pressures

One of the main institutional pressures reported related to enabling students to produce their work and progress. Diana⁶ and Jen highlighted a twofold responsibility in their role:

“[There is an] obligation or an interest⁷, [the] university counselling services are obviously there to make sure that students are ok and doing their work and progressing as well as obviously for all the other reasons that counselling services are there” (Diana 9.9-16⁸).

“We are...an education based service...the trajectory...is to fulfil the criteria of getting through the academic outcomes. (...) We haven’t got a lot of time, and the college doesn’t have a lot of time. If you were sitting here with somebody, in an IAPT service,

⁶ Participant pseudonym

⁷ Key to notation: utterances such as “erm”, “you know”, minor hesitations and repetitions have been removed to aid readability of the quotes; [text] indicates explanatory text added by the researcher; ... indicate editorial omission of non-relevant material; (...) indicates different section in the same transcript; in-quote single quotation marks indicate participants citing phrases by counsellor or student in a session.

⁸ Location of quote in its original transcript: page number.line number-(page number.)line number

it would be very different. Our primary task isn't therapy, our primary task is academia, we're here to support that, so it has a different frame" (Jen, 16.13-15 and 16.33-17.4).

As stressed in the literature (see Chapter One) university counselling services have both a professional duty of care for distressed students as well as a commitment to the institution's academic mission (e.g. RCP, 2011; Universities UK, 2015). For example, a responsibility to the institution was suggested in Jen's references to "fulfil" the academic "criteria" and Diana voiced an "interest" or "obligation" to prioritise students' academic progression. However, such pressures to meet institutional demands, whilst attending to individual students' needs, may position these HE practitioners in ethically challenging situations ([see Chapter One] Hewitt & Wheeler, 2004; Hallet, 2012). This also seemed implied by Diana who described the experience of having "the university's eye on us...to produce people who pass exams" (Diana, 9.2-3). Similarly, Jen's reference to "trajectory" and "the college doesn't have a lot of time" may also emphasise felt pressures to promptly help distressed students back on track to studying.

Considering their references to procrastination specifically, for instance, Claudette emphasised that procrastination had "implications for the university" and for "retention", hence, "as a university counsellor" it was an issue to be "taken very seriously" and not "underestimate the importance of it" as procrastinating students were "on the road of dropping out" (Claudette, 9.33-10.5).

4.1.2 Dilemmas of short-term work

Nine participants worked in a service that offered students a standard of six counselling sessions; some, with the possibility of extending (see Table 1 in Chapter Three: 3.4.3).

In this subtheme, several counsellors reflected on the challenges of working with a brief therapeutic model:

“I think that is the sadness about working in a university (...) It is quite wearing on therapists to keep saying goodbye [to students]...I often refer people for long-term therapy...It would be really nice to be part of that, not always being the gatekeeper to something that goes on for longer... I have described it as doing something to your soul...never getting the satisfaction that you imagine other people are getting in seeing something through a bit more” (Claudette, 21.8-10; 22.12-32).

“[On working in a brief model] I feel that it is very challenging actually, it requires you to be very experienced and effective with what you are offering. You have got to be able to be present in the situation and make something happen in each session, you do not have the luxury of reflection in the same way you do in longer term, and you don’t have the reward of seeing somebody changing over time, it is a bit about firefighting” (Jen, 24.29-25.3).

Claudette’s heartfelt “doing something to your soul” suggested a sense of professional deprivation for not having the opportunity to engage with students on a deeper level that long-term work would allow. Jen echoed this when she described not experiencing the “luxury of reflection” or “reward” enabled by longer-term therapy. The lengthier counselling these practitioners wished that they could offer seemed to reflect the deep and explorative work referred to in the psychodynamic literature by Schuman (1981) and, more recently, Birner (1993). Although Schuman and Birner’s work derived from non-academic contexts, they recommended long-term treatment for procrastination.

Similar to Claudette and Jen, other participants also reflected on the limitations of short-term therapy. For instance, Brenda described her work as an “extended assessment rather than therapy” where students were “given a taster of what it is like to have talking therapy” (Brenda, 17.25). The implications of these accounts suggested that the treatment of procrastination might not be suited for brief work.

By contrast, although the above participants recognised the demands of short-term therapy some of them also developed creative ways of managing it. For example, Eric described:

“...it is about being able to be adaptive and...get some level of response...I say...‘I cannot take you from A to Z, I can hopefully take you to a place where you maybe take a step forward (...) really trying to engage them, and the whole purpose of that is that...the time they spend with me is very concentrated...like a blackcurrant juice...at the bottom of the glass, they have to go away and put that water in to dilute it” (Eric, 9.29-10.3; 10.6-15).

Eric’s reference to his “adaptive” and “engaged” approach seemed endorsed by Rickinson’s (1997) suggestion that effective short-term HE counselling requires counsellors to remain highly active and engaged in the sessions. Expanding on this, Macaskill (2012) added that HE counselling required particularly specialised and experienced practitioners. Several participants seemed to concur, for example, Eric described that the counselling offered him a “small window” to make influential input and that “not anybody can do this work” (Eric. 30.30; 30.24). Similarly, Jen’s earlier quote emphasised that this work required “very experienced” and “effective”

practitioners that “make something happen in each session”. The contextual challenges acknowledged in previous research thus seemed particularly noted by participants’ accounts in this Master Theme.

4.2 Master Theme 2: De-skilled Procrastination

This master theme focuses on participants’ experiences of working therapeutically with a procrastination “style” which is seen as a skills-deficit (analytic steps in Chapter Three illustrate how this notion of “styles” emerged). The first subtheme reflects these participants’ perception of this presentation, the subsequent two subthemes address interventions implemented for this style and the observed changes from these therapeutic strategies.

4.2.1 De-skilled style of procrastination

Several participants referred to a style of procrastination described as a practical skills-deficit:

“There are times when procrastination is just procrastination” (Diana, 3.33) when *“someone is just procrastinating”* (Claudette, 10.17) and *“just not getting on with their assignment”* (Fran, 16.10) for reasons that are *“quite superficial and simple”* (Harold, 1.30) such as being *“disorganised”* (Brenda, 1.25) or for not *“managing their time better”* (Claudette, 10.24).

The above descriptors suggest that, at times, these participants encountered students who procrastinated due to a practical lack of know-how rather than an unhelpful

cognitions or some unmet emotional need (see: 4.3.1, 4.4.1 & 4.4.2). For example, Fran and George experienced as follows:

“They are not doing what they need to do, because what they need to do is speak to a tutor and get a bit more information about something or get the appropriate book to read up, so there might be that some little piece of the puzzle that still needs to be sorted out that they need to actually gather some other information in order to get on with things...and it could be just that they do not manage time well.” (Fran, 5.6-15).

“[Some students say] ‘if I procrastinate maybe I will get some inspiration later, maybe someone will help me, maybe I will find that piece of elusive literature I have been looking for that will tell me what to say in my essay’. They hope that something will turn up, so the longer they leave it, the more likely that something will happen and it will be ok...[There is] a hope that one will find some keys to whatever the task is that they are trying to put off and avoid doing” (George, 7.11-20).

These accounts note that students procrastinated here due to skills deficits. For instance, Fran’s references to “get the appropriate book” and finding a “piece of the puzzle” were similar to George’s “piece of elusive literature” and finding “keys to...the task” which perhaps suggested that students seemed to become particularly de-skilled and uncreative when required to study independently. Eric also made this association by highlighting that requirements for autonomous studying in HE may lead those used to a sense of “hand-holding” to procrastination as “there is nobody there guiding them or supporting them” (Eric, 41.16-17). This need for guidance seemed to indicate a skills deficit. As highlighted by Macaskill (2012), HE requirements for independent learning

may make it particularly difficult for some students to progress (see Chapter One: 1.2). While Macaskill's work referred to general student distress, the accounts in this subtheme seemed to contextualise this with relevance to procrastination.

Deskilled procrastination seemed further implied in Fran's description that students did "not manage time well". George's references to students that "leave" "put off" or "avoid" their work in the hope of a "later" resolution added to the notion of procrastination as poor time management. These accounts seemed to reflect previous research from a temporal discounting perspective (see Chapter Two: 2.2) that understand the behaviour as a means to avoid a potentially challenging task by favouring activities that perhaps offered immediate gratification (e.g. Steel, 2007; Tice & Baumesiter, 1997). While poor time management may have different underlying causes, in this context it seemed relevant to a de-skilled procrastination style as the counsellors' accounts focused on practical obstacles to students' productivity that required specific behavioural solutions, as illustrated in the next subtheme.

4.2.2 Therapeutic solutions for "de-skilled" procrastination

When addressing procrastination as de-skilled participants seemed to adopt pragmatic therapeutic interventions. As highlighted in the quotes below:

"with disorganised people...you can just give them an activity schedule and plan their day and things like that (...) the symptom management of the procrastination would...be behavioural experiments or structuring your time" (Brenda, 2.12-14; 26.21-23).

“It might be just helping them either make a plan or prioritise what needs to be done.”
(Fran, 5.13-14).

“I have what I call a time wheel, and it will be two wheels with twelve hours... [we] fill it out in the session...which is a bit more practical and the idea of it is to try to identify where their time is [spent]” (Eric, 7.8-17).

In line with some behavioural approaches (see Chapter Two: 2.3.1) the above accounts seem to reinforce self-supportive strategies. For example, Brenda and Fran introduced students to routine and schedule keeping to enhance their time management and automaticity. From Eric’s time management techniques it seemed as if he endeavoured to raise students’ awareness about the hours wasted when procrastinating, wherefrom he could say to students:

“‘[one hour per day] over...seven weeks...is 49 hours...you do not have to put in 49 hours, but if you were to take some hours out of your TV [watching] what are you prepared or...willing to give up?’ (...) So if they can start... something that says ‘well let me put in two hours a day for five days, no more than that, the weekends are free.’ (...) We [also] discover whether they are a morning, afternoon or evening person...use that time where they are most productive” (Eric, 7.26-32; 8.15-19 & 8.23-28).

Eric aspired to tap into students own resources by asking when they function best and how much time they feel able to allocate to studying. Exploring students’ capabilities to evoke studying strategies seemed reflective of other participants’ interventions:

“...playing in to the person’s strengths and their resources (...) In other words ‘if you were to see yourself getting on with some work between now and next time we meet...what would that look like, where would you be, how would you be doing it?’ When you draw it down, people have enormous ideas... [Some] say ‘well I work better at night’. ‘...ok, [the] library is open 24 hours, is there some way of organising yourself so that you are more likely to be at your best when you...try and study?’ Things like that” (George, 3.24; 3.28-4.3).

“A lot of the work is about getting them to think of their own tacit competencies... Like one student I had she was in an orchestra, and she was very good at helping herself to perform to get ready for a performance, but she had no kind of ritual to get herself ready to write an essay so therefore there was no way in, no way of getting started. So we worked a lot on getting rituals on getting started” (Ann, 4.23-29).

These accounts indicated that participants aspired to enhance students’ repertoire of skills and strategies that seemed absent in this procrastination style. These counsellors’ approaches seemed informed by a practical focus which drew on students own ideas and resources about how to overcome their procrastination. Overall, the therapeutic solutions in this subtheme strongly resembled popularly utilised behavioural approaches when counselling procrastination, as highlighted by Schouwenburg et al. (2004). According to Schouwenburg et al., such interventions aimed to enhance students’ study behaviour by resisting the influences of distractions (as highlighted in Chapter Two: 2.3). Whilst it may seem interesting that participants chose to work with such overt practical emphasis, these approaches may have functioned as an adaptive response to the contextual challenges (see Master Theme 1).

4.2.3 Skill-specific changes

This subtheme focuses on the therapeutic changes participants talked about in relation to de-skilled procrastination. Diana, Jen and Ann discussed:

“once you really kind of start to focus on the practical issues it can also be quite rewarding because when you come up with [ideas] from where the student is able to say something or bring something out or has a realisation...and then they come back the following week and say ‘well actually I did do that and look, I have done a bit of it’ or... ‘I made a start’ then that can be... starting the process and carrying on” (Diana, 11, 10-20).

” I am a great fan of behavioural work because I think [the] results are tangible. I think the student is able to deconstruct a specific thing that they want to work on...you set it all up together, and they come back [and say] ‘it was never as bad as I thought’...it feels like they are achieving something and I think those things are really working” (Jen, 18.2-12).

“[in the bases for change there are] obviously a repertoire of strategies, something that can be done behaviourally, because sometimes for these people, if they can get a sense that they can do it differently, then it changes. ... It has to be co-constructed in the therapy, and then the client has to enact it. (...) Once they get that education of strategies, how to get in, how to start, how to get in to a topic and forget themselves and get engrossed in this. (...) Then they take off and they do it” (Ann, 6.21-28; 9.26-30).

The above quotes indicate that students seemed to respond well to skills-focused interventions and participants' reflections indicated a number of aspects to the quality of change here. For example, co-constructing behavioural tasks seemed important in enabling students to "come back" (Jen and Diana) and report their weekly achievements from having "enacted" (Ann) these studying strategies. These accounts seemed to echo Schouwenburg's (2004a) argument that monitoring progression, of any degree, promoted the continuation of further productivity when counselling procrastination. Accordingly, to these counsellors, such collaborative monitoring of progression in counselling seemed to spark an important momentum for change. For example, Ann observed students to "take off" and for Diana this was seen as "starting the process and carrying on". Similarly, in her transcript Fran noted: "each day that they do it they are likely to find it easier to do it again and again" (Fran, 7.3-4).

These accounts suggested that deskilled procrastination was straightforwardly addressed. Further to the above quotes, other participants' indicated that the scaffolding of required skills was "simple in a sense" (Fran, 6.19). For example, Brenda stated that overcoming de-skilled procrastination was "not rocket science" (Brenda, 21.29), whilst Fran and George suggested that maintaining a practical solution-focus enabled students to identify the required actions to overcome their predicament. Hence, these accounts conveyed a sense of responsiveness in students, which suggested that the challenges previously mentioned (see Master Theme 1) did not explicitly impact on this procrastination style.

4.3 Master Theme 3: Anxious/fearful Procrastination

This master theme reflects a distinct style of procrastination, which participants described in relation to the students' anxieties and fears. Here, procrastination seemed understood as a deeper psychological issue than the de-skilled style that required different therapeutic solutions.

4.3.1 Procrastination as fear-fuelled

In this subtheme, participants talked about a procrastination style, which seemed related to students' anxious appraisal of their academic tasks. For example, students seemed concerned about their ability to produce work appropriate to their appraisals. Fran, Eric, Ann and Brenda talked about the following:

“often it is because they, they see it as one big task that is so important and they feel like they have got to explain everything that they know and...this is going to be what their degree is all about and they...make it [the task] seem enormous, it just get so inflated with all these fearful thoughts (...) procrastination is...a way of avoiding the discomfort” (Fran, 3.12-18; 19.21).

“[They] feel overwhelmed...and predict...that it is going to be too hard and...[As] they do not want to feel that level of anxiety, they avoid it” (Eric, 13.13-21).

“They do not have that self-soothing capacity; they cannot reframe it to make it more doable, they stay with the original monster story of how awful it is (...) when it is all-important... [They] get frightened and lose...confidence” (Ann, 8.33-9.3; 22.22).

“The anxiety side is more when people are procrastinating when they are very scared about something (...) because the work is too scary” (Brenda, 8.33-9.1; 9.14).

These accounts indicated that, at times, students worried about their ability to conduct academic work as appropriate to their negative appraisals. Achieving a task according to these appraisals did not seem realistic and achievable, by contrast their unhelpful impact seemed to render students “scared” (Brenda), “frightened” (Ann) or “overwhelmed” (Eric). Hence, students were seen to procrastinate as a means to avoid the discomfort or anxiety evoked by these appraisals. These accounts echoed aspects of Ellis and Knaus (1977) rational-emotive behavioural theory (see Chapter Two: 2.3) which have identified low frustration tolerance to underpin procrastination.

These counsellors reported that students’ concerns about their academic abilities were also reflected in anxious appraisals about their results. Iggy, Diana and Fran further discussed such outcome-related worries:

“At the heart, it is....some kind of fear; fear of getting it done and what that means, fear of not doing good enough (...) sometimes people procrastinate for...fear of failure, fear of success ” (Iggy, 2.28-31; 7.7-8).

“We talk often about a fear of failure but less so about fear of success and both of those come in to it” (Diana, 8.15-20).

“It might be because they are anxious about the ending... always known what they were going to do next until now” or “that they are afraid of failing...so they rather not do anything” (Fran, 2.12-22; 8.9-13).

Here again, participants indicated a relationship between procrastination and students’ anxious appraisals. However, these quotes highlighted students’ concerns about the outcomes of their successful or unsuccessful academic work. These counsellors experienced instances where students procrastinated when fearing failure, a notion that has been widely stressed in the procrastination literature (e.g. Dryden & Sabelus, 2010; Solomon & Rothblum, 1984). By contrast, highlighting less elaborated theories, participants also experienced students to procrastinate from worries related to successful academic outcomes, such as concerns about life after graduation (Fran). Iggy and Diana echoed Rorer’s (1983) original theory by naming this a “fear of success”. Again, there is a sense that students resort to procrastination to remain in a perceived zone of comfort and safety, away from the anxieties evoked from their appraisals about academic performance or post-graduation pressures.

Overall, this procrastination style is distinctive in that students seek to avoid the anxiety evoked by fears and worries related to their academic work. Interestingly, as these counsellors reported anxiety as prevalent among these students, this finding starkly contrasts Steel’s (2007) influential research review that has dismissed the relationship between fears, anxiety and procrastination.

4.3.2 Therapeutic solutions for anxious/fearful procrastination

When working with this style, these counsellors responded with strategies to address students' perceptions about their academic work. The accounts below highlight how participants utilised the therapeutic space to target students' unhelpful appraisals:

“[in counselling we are] taking a look at what is going on frame by frame, what is happening? What is stopping you? What are the fears? (...).so breaking it down, [into] manageable chunks” (Fran, 3.10-12 & 3.19).

“If it is literally a task appraisal...it is something about working in a CBT way with the task appraisal so that they can learn to interrogate their own appraisals, you know the antecedents, the beliefs and the consequences” (Ann 2.32-33 3.1-5).

“I...introduce the client to breaking down the experience of (...) [when] it is anxiety based...we break it down to...the hot cross bun of procrastination (...) we look at what procrastination mean to you ...what are you doing, let's list the evidence that you know you are going to fail and everything is against you” (Jen, 3.23-28, 5.14-15).

Here, counsellors seemed to target the fearful and anxious appraisals that underpinned this style (as section 4.3.1 illustrated). It seemed that the participants aimed to, firstly, identify students' specific appraisals and, secondly, challenging these by encouraging them to “interrogate” (Ann) or “list the evidence” (Jen) for their unhelpful beliefs. These interventions were similar to the cognitive-behavioural therapeutic approaches (see Chapter Two: 2.3.1) which have emphasised the value in raising students' self-awareness about their beliefs when counselling procrastination. For instance, Dryden

(e.g. 2012) has emphasised that individuals are likely to procrastinate based on imagined ideas about what facing the task could be like (e.g. “it is going to be too hard”, “I am going to fail”). Accordingly, without using REBT jargon, these practitioners endeavoured to “breaking down” (Fran, above; Harold, 3.27; Jen, above) and thus raising students’ self-insight about their concealed motives for procrastinating.

Further to enhancing students’ their self-awareness, it seemed that the participants also utilised the therapeutic space to encourage students to anticipate and endure discomfort when producing work. This seemed particularly well illustrated in Brenda, Jen and Eric’s accounts:

“[help them see that it] will only get more visceral and gather steam if I keep avoiding, but the process of not avoiding is not that dissimilar, so it feels struggle, it feels uncomfortable, it feels raw” (Jen, 19.25-27).

“So we try find things that will stretch them in some ways and to put them in a sort of less comfortable zone, they have got to step out of their comfort zone of not doing it because it is easy and whatever and see that there is longer term pain if they do not act now” (Eric, 8.9-12).

“[If] they are procrastinating because they do not feel that comfortable doing the thing then it would be about managing the anxiety around that (...) By recognising the negative consequences, it has so it is like short term relief ...but then long term it is still there. So I think if you can really look...is this working for you” (Brenda, 9.5-8 & 9.21-31).

These interventions seemed aimed at the cascading cycle of anxious avoidance. Paradoxically, it seemed as if these counsellors not only encouraged students to “step out of their comfort zone” (Eric), but they also brought students’ attention to the frustrations that ought to be anticipated, that subsequently needed to be endured, when facing the anxieties of academic work. Again, these approaches seemed aligned with REBT techniques that targeted procrastination with rational action to heighten clients’ leverage for frustration tolerance (Dryden, 2010; Ellis & Knaus, 1977; Van Essen, 2004). Overall, these therapeutic techniques could be understood as facilitating students’ meta-position to their anxiety.

4.3.3 Change by Reappraisals of Their Practices

This subtheme highlights the changes participants have observed from utilising the abovementioned strategies with anxious/fearful procrastination styles. In these accounts, participant talked about two (distinct) qualities to the change here. Firstly, students are experienced to change from acknowledging the repercussions of their procrastination and, secondly, a noted element of change from students reframing previously negative appraisals into more positive ones.

Eric and Fran shared their perception of students’ change from gaining awareness of the potential consequences of procrastination:

“Because of the content that we put in, and the context of why they are here, it changes. It really does change, and because it is time bound ... they cannot ...stay in that

procrastination state because they will fail the year... [and] they have to pay extra for it” (Eric, 33.30-32).

“once they know that they are doing it is a bit more difficult...so at least by identifying what they do ...they are not going to be fooled next time they are doing it they realise that they are ... procrastinating” (Fran, 6.20-33).

These accounts illustrate that students widened perspective, can prevent further procrastination. The implication of this finding suggested that enhancing students’ awareness of the potential consequences of would no longer render procrastination as a comfortable option to eschew anxiety. Thus, as highlighted in the counselling literature (e.g. Van Essen, 2004), there is an implication that rationality helps to overcome this issue.

In addition to an awareness of the consequences of procrastination, participants also reflected on the changes they had observed from helping students to breaking down their process (see section 4.3.2). Iggy, Ann and Harold illustrate this further:

“trusting their core capacity...framing that creative potential as something which they can feel motivated by rather than intimidated by (...) what is the meaning and value of this for me so even if I am trying to meet and external requirement...I am doing it for me rather than trying to somehow get caught up in the fear about how others will see that” (Harold, 7.28-8.2; 14.1-5).

“So that they can charm themselves in...or break the task down and therefore not see it as daunting and avoid it (...) attune to the frustration, name it, and once it is named if you can get a client to be honest; and name what they, what stops them...how they appraise it, then ...they can re-author that, they can re-frame that...so it becomes doable” (Ann, 2.3-5; 8.26-32).

“there is always something...to be salvaged...there is some hope breathed into that situation (...) there would be a resolution of the tension between loss and hope between the pain having wasted all this time...on the one hand...thinking ‘aha but now I can go forward because I have been able to name this toad the has the sitting on my head all this while” (Iggy, 6.4-6; 6.12-17).

These counsellors’ experiences indicated that helping to raise students’ self-awareness about why they procrastinated, including its consequences, assisted students in reframing their previous anxious appraisals into accounts of hope and capacity. This outcome of re-authoring is broadly in keeping with O’Callaghan’s (2004) narrative stance where procrastinating student clients were helped to develop their experience into richer accounts that uncovered stories of capacity and agency.

Additionally, these counsellors also seemed to attribute the change to have emerged from interactions where they encouraged students to stay with their frustration and tolerate the discomfort that was evoked when facing their anxieties. Interestingly, this seemed reflective of Schuman’s (1981) relationally influenced psychodynamic case study from a non-academic context. Schuman’s paper highlighted the value in the

therapist *being* with the client in a way that conveyed tolerance and acceptance, which the client could adopt and implement to overcome their procrastination.

4.4 Master Theme 4: Conflictual Procrastination

This final master theme offers a distinct procrastination style seen as a gridlock between two intrapsychic dynamics when students feel pressured to perform. One of these is constructed as a rebellious resistance (subtheme 4.4.1), and the other suggests a self-critical and self-punitive process (subtheme 4.4.2). As counsellors experience students' conflictual relationship with their self to oscillate between these two positions, an internal conflict seems characteristic of this procrastination style.

Participants talked about these dynamics as both distinct and related. For instance, Iggy and Ann talked about the circular relationship between the two positions:

“Procrastination is somewhere inside a breach of a trust with oneself, you know ‘I am not doing this, and I keep promising that I will do it. I keep promising myself that I will do it and then I don’t, so I feel like shit for not doing it’. Right in their breach of trust with themselves” (Iggy, 15.8-12).

“Nobody is out to get them, nobody is forcing them, they have chosen to put themselves into this, but yet they forget that choice. So it's almost like they are back with a non-empathically attuned parent who's trying to control them and they are fighting back” (Ann, 17.4-8).

The above quotes point to the intrapsychic conflict that seems to underpin this procrastination style. On one end, this conflict concerns a stubborn resistance against following through with intended plans, referenced as rebelliousness in some of the literature (e.g. Fenichel, 1945). On the other end, it reflects a self-critical experience (Flett, Hewitt, Davis, & Sherry, 2004; Sirois & Pychyl, 2013; Sirois, 2014) which makes producing work particularly painful. This interpretation suggests that the interrelatedness between these dynamics forms conflictual procrastination presentations. However, these pressures operate in opposite directions, and many participants talked about them as distinct. To clarify, the individual constructions of these two components are addressed in subthemes 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 respectively.

4.4.1 Procrastination as resistance practice

In this subtheme, it is as if students are experienced as conflicted between having to do work and stubborn, resistant practices. Ann and Iggy discuss:

“Procrastination is about a resistance in terms of motivation, some people feel they ought to do it, they have to do it, but they don’t really want to do it...people only do what they really want to do I think.” (Ann, 23.31-24.2).

“Sometimes people...procrastinate for complex motives...for example put off finishing the degree because they...have got another agenda like they don’t want a degree anyway or they want to do some other possibly undefined thing on the planet...part of a larger plot” (Iggy, 8.7-15).

Ann and Iggy described students' resistance when obligated to work. These accounts highlighted procrastination as a conflict between what students "ought to do" (Ann) when they actually "want to do" (Ann; Iggy) something different. The psychodynamic theory has captured this when constructing procrastination as a way of rebelling against externally imposed demands (e.g. Fenichel, 1945). George and Eric discuss further:

"I find it very...important what course they are doing and...who chose [that course]...say they are doing pharmacy, and if their father is a pharmacist...they [the client] may not want to do that; they might want to do an art...at some point they are going to run out of steam...to finish that course...because it is someone else's expectations." (Eric, 5.31-6.7).

"Sometimes people genuinely do not want to be doing the courses that they are doing... 'I did not want to do this, this is not my choice', but there is maybe...some other agenda that family or somebody else has put them in that position...they find themselves...[saying] 'I cannot get my head around all of this, not I cannot, I do not want to get my head around all of this, this is not interesting to me' and the amount of work that needs to be done, you have got to be quite motivated...no one is lazy when they want to do something" (George, 20.1-24)

Similar to the first two quotes in this subtheme, the above accounts also highlighted the importance in students *wanting* to pursue their course, informed by their own choosing. Eric and George talk in similar ways about students becoming demotivated and thus procrastinate when their subject area was imposed on them to meet significant others' expectations. The accounts in this subtheme seem to reflect Schuman's (1981) theory

that individuals' procrastinate as a means of remaining in a child-state free from the autonomy and responsibility of adulthood.

4.4.2 Procrastination as self-punitive

Participants reported that students experienced a sense of self-punishment that seemed to co-occur with the resistance practice (mentioned above) in this conflictual procrastination style. As talked about by Claudette and Fran:

“[These students] often have very harsh superegos...this punitive superego that makes it difficult for them. They tend to...imagine that no one else is having this problem; it is just them, because they are weak and a failure as a person. (...) [They have] so many fantasies of what it is like for other people and how it should be for them (...) [they] talk about not being able to get on with their work, being very impatient with themselves” (Claudette, 19.20-26; 20.4-6; 25.4-5).

“[They do not] recognise that we do need to stop sometimes to have a break and fun as well and without feeling guilty (...) Because often they punish themselves, not go out because they should be working, stay in but not work (...) [Students say they] are bad or lazy... [They] can be harsh towards themselves” (Fran, 7.7-12; 14.4-9).

The above extracts indicate the self-punitive process that these participants talked about having experienced in their student clients. At times, it seemed that students were seen to hold unrealistic ideas about task completion and that achievement ought to be effortless. As described by Claudette and Fran these students' procrastination was perceived as a problematic conflict between self-imposed expectations about how their

studies “should” be completed and the harsh or un-empathic repercussions suffered when they struggled to perform accordingly. These accounts conveyed the negative self-appraisal held by students who described themselves as “weak and a failure” (Claudette) and “bad or lazy” (Fran) for experiencing these difficulties.

This notion seems to emerge across the participants accounts as students were described to have “*high expectations of themselves*” (Harold) and “*as soon as they do something*” or attempt to meet these high standards “*their flaws come out*” (Diana, 8.5) and “*they present at the service in a real state saying ‘what’s wrong with me, I feel terrible...stressed...panicked, I don’t want to be here, I am not good enough to be here etc.’*” (Jen, 5.32-6.2). The counsellors reported that students’ self-punitive process seemed to evoke feelings of insufficiency, which fed into further procrastination. These perceptions conveyed that students self-critique seemed related to assumptions that the work ‘should’ be easy. Hence, echoing Ellis and Knaus’ (1977) theory on the self-downing beliefs where individuals associate their self-value with academic performance (see Chapter Two: 2.3).

Whilst the above accounts seemed to reflect an aspect of REBT theory (Ellis & Knaus, 1977) on procrastination, Claudette’s above references to “superego” implied that she found particular insight from psychodynamic theory and concepts (e.g. Freud 1926/1936) to convey her understanding of students’ critical self. Eric’s account also seemed to reflect this notion:

*“They [have]... an internal self-talk...a critic...or judge that is inside of them (...)
When there is an inner critic going on...that critic will talk for England...that critic is*

very powerful, just like the ego, and the id. It is very, very powerful...you will start listening to that part of you and then you start responding to this as if it is the whole ”
(Eric, 27.19-28.5)

Eric offered a deepened insight into conflictual procrastination, which portrayed the self-punitive aspect that seemed to create a painful emotional experience for students. For Eric, this process seemed understood in relation to students’ multiple experiences of self. In other words, a critical “part” that rendered students feeling unable to produce. In line with Flett et al.’s (2004) work, accounts from this subtheme associate procrastination with self-criticism as clients avoid the pain and distress evoked when attempting to work.

4.4.3 Therapeutic solution for conflictual procrastination

When talking about counselling with this procrastination style participants emphasised empathy and their endeavours to attune with students in this way by meeting them with warmth and compassion, as discussed by Fran and Jen:

“Reassuring a person that they are not mad and bad or not good enough is my first point of call, and also that it is okay to need help, and it is okay not to know how to manage certain things, that you can learn to and also that this is part of growing and learning and...expanding...become able to master things as you move along” (Jen, 7.27-32).

“I think normalising, it and accepting that it happens and it is not that you are bad or lazy because...people can be harsh towards themselves (...) Accepting that it

happens...that we are not alone, lots of people do it...and that...we can get through that” (Fran, 14.3-6; 15.19-20).

Through responses such as actively “reassuring” (Jen) or “normalising” (Fran), these counsellors seemed enabled to directly show students their non-judgemental stance. By attuning to their students in this way, it was as if they could (variously) communicate a sense of acceptance, which contrasted the self-condemnation or demands that seemed to underpin this procrastination style (see sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2). As participants highlighted further:

“I have got to be careful...that I do not reject them because if I reject them, they will think ‘oh my god, I am so bad, nobody can help me’ “ (Eric 20.18-21).

“meeting...them... in such a way that it does not blow the fuses, like they do a runner back into more procrastination or...blow the fuses in terms that they feel so abominable about it about they can’t move on, so that is the challenge...it’s just getting it right really, getting it right within the alliance” (Iggy, 7.7-24).

These quotes pointed out the importance of sensitively approaching the students, who seemed particularly impressionable to Iggy and Eric. Their accounts added to the first quotes in this subtheme, all of which implicitly or explicitly communicated empathy and acceptance when counselling this conflictual style. Conveying such compassion seemed to function as an immediate stepping-stone towards establishing a therapeutic relationship. As made explicit, perhaps, in the following accounts:

“It [the work] tends to be much more about the relationship. That if I can build a strong relationship with them that they feel that, first of all, that I am not going to judge them, I am not going to criticise them” (Eric, 8.1-4).

“You [the student] have let yourself down, and you feel judged on a lot of levels, so you have got to as a therapist...create an environment with sufficient compassion in order to generate self-compassion. (...) It is about compassion really, and compassion is...in the bottom drawer of the alliance building” (Iggy, 5.1-5; 16.2-3).

“because of the relationship hopefully they know that they are not going to be judged or criticised or no one is going to think badly of them if they do not manage, it is okay, we can keep you know keep figuring out some way through” (Fran, 18.23-26).

The final quotes in this subtheme highlighted the importance of counsellors’ non-judgemental stance in the context of the therapeutic relationship. The accounts in this subtheme highlighted the humanistic influences (e.g. Rogers, 1957) to these counsellors’ approaches, such as empathy and acceptance. By contrast to a traditional humanistic approach, perhaps, the participants seemed to actively and directly communicate these qualities to students. It could be suggested that they adopted such direct approaches in response to the contextual challenges highlighted in Master Theme 1. As opposed to implementing an explorative therapeutic approach, one that may make clients’ more enfeebled for a time (e.g. Birner, 1993; Schuman, 1981), these counsellors’ work seemed more focused on promptly offering empathic support. A fundamental aspect of counselling with conflictual styles thus seemed reflected in the counsellors attending to students in a way that they could continually adopt outside

their therapy. Thus, this emphasis on empathic support seemed aimed at offering students a relationally corrective experience. However, engaging them in a way that evoked therapeutic change, within a brief counselling model, seemed challenging for these counsellors, as will be addressed in the final subtheme of this chapter.

4.4.4 Experiencing students' resistance and reflections on change

When reflecting on therapy with conflictual procrastination styles, counsellors seemed to report outcomes that were of a more ongoing nature. The resistant dynamic of this procrastination style (see section 4.4.1), combined with the brevity of the counselling contract, meant that students had to take prompt ownership of their problem, which seemed quite challenging with more complex, conflictual styles:

“sometimes presented as stagnation or anger at having to open up and to relate...can be...a defensive process...I don't have a lot of time...because of...the limited resources...I am...straight with students and say 'look we only have this amount of time, you get out what you put in [so] it is up to you' (...) [Having] genuine...time and attention given to their problem...can feel...exposing...[and] very few...can do that without defending themselves and corrupting what's really going on for them” (Jen 10.5-17; 14.13-18).

“just getting them to own it...might simply be committing to it... 'well are you going to do it or not?'...actually once that is said, 'well yes I am' ... maybe...there is already a bit of a shift...getting them to decide and make a choice about it instead of feeling burdened and...pushed in to...or pressurised, that actually this is their choice because

they can choose not to do it and fail their degree...simple question, are you going to or not?" (Fran, 3.28-32).

"I say 'nobody has to be in university', 'nobody has to do this', 'if it is so painful, why do it?' and then at least existentially, they can think about, well do I really want to do this? ...maybe nobody has had quite that conversation with them" (Ann, 7.29-8.3; 10.6-16)"

Given the constraints of brief therapy, the leverage for exploring students' resistance seemed limited and, accordingly, these participants seemed to emphasise the value of relational therapeutic dynamic that seemed underpinned by a sense of honest congruence. To address students' disengagement, counsellors seemed to adopt interventions that broadly resembled Van Hoorebeck et al.'s (2004) constructive confrontational approaches when counselling procrastination (see Chapter Two: 2.5).

However, at times, the counsellors seemed to find it particularly challenging to engage students' who remained resistant despite their efforts to promptly spark a therapeutic interaction. These experiences seemed indicative of several participants who, at times, thought "just do it" (Brenda, 1.31); or "feel a frustration" (Jen, 9.28); or feel "heavy and "powerless (Diana, 11.5 & 11.7); or "hopeless" and "helpless" (Harold, 9.8) with students' whose procrastination seemed rigid to change. They reported:

"...they were not ready; they were not prepared...sometimes I get very disappointed, and I get sad, and sometimes I get angry because no matter what that student is very resistant and they not ready for change so that saddens me" (Eric, 18.2-7).

The struggle to work in a stagnant therapeutic encounter with the resistant procrastinators was also illustrated by Brenda and Iggy:

“... it feels shit [laughs] like you are just not getting anywhere and you say ‘look I don’t think we are getting anywhere’, and that does not get us anywhere either [laughs] the core isn’t shifting and discussing that the core isn’t shifting anything either.” (Iggy, 19.27-31)

“The ones who are very slow...who are really demotivated can feel a bit like you are wading through mud, can be a bit frustrating. “ (Brenda, 11.25-24)

These accounts seem consistent with psychoanalytic case studies that have cautioned about the strong feelings procrastinating clients may elicit in therapists (Birner, 1993; Holzman, 1964; Schuman, 1981). Those studies, however, lasted a number of years that enabled the therapeutic work to unfold gradually; including an understanding of these feelings as countertransference reactions (e.g. Joseph, 1985) in therapists. Several participants reported that their emotional reactions could be indicative of their student client’s experience. However, the brevity of the offered counselling seemed to constrain the extent to which these feelings could be understood and effectively used (e.g. Schuman, 1981) in their interventions with students.

The utility of longer-term contract was highlighted in the final two quotes which convey Ann and Harold’s experiences of change with conflictual styles:

“They can re-programme themselves...but that takes longer because you are dealing with the relationship with themselves (...) it's like untangling a knot...with some I have managed that where we have connected sufficiently that they know I care and I am understanding them, and therefore they can get to see where they are sabotaging themselves and how they can maybe be differently with themselves to do it differently. So it is learning to relate to themselves differently....they can grow up in the adult situation they are in and see that [they] have different resources now” (Ann, 3.27-29; 16.29-17.14).

“I actually have worked with people who have dismantled all of that...moved from a fantasy world into an engaged real-world and then the work...becomes an expression of that that has been hugely satisfying so you will see somebody who actually has a fundamental shift...when they stop procrastinating and start engaging and expressing themselves through their work, they have a whole new sense of valuing that is very profound sometimes” (Harold, 11.13-28)

Ann's quote described the effective outcome of offering a relationally corrective experience, developed from a relationship of “care” and “understanding” (e.g. Rogers, 1957) in the therapeutic context. In a similar yet contrasting way, Harold's quote conveyed his experiences of observing change through engaging these students in a way that they could translate into their lives outside therapy. Similar to Ann, later in his transcript, Harold reported his endeavours to “meeting”, “valuing”, “nurturing” and “taking clients seriously” as he observed a change in the context of the therapeutic “relationship” (Harold, 16.7-9). Conveyed in their interviews, Ann's past and Harold's then present experiences of offering longer counselling contracts seemed to allow them

to see students through their difficulties. As highlighted in Master Theme 1, perhaps, brief models did not give license for deep and explorative work. It would have been interesting to learn whether the other participants would have experienced a shift in their student clients similar to Harold and Ann, had they also experienced counselling with conflictual styles on an ongoing basis.

To summarise, overall, these results highlight how participants' experiences of counselling procrastination seem to have enabled them to understand the nexus of thinking and feeling which evokes procrastination behaviour. Through understanding its underlying diversity, the counsellors seemed enabled to offer interventions as required by students' different presentations; albeit, with consideration of what was possible and realistic given the challenges of this setting. The following chapter will explore the key findings of these results and discuss its implications with relevance to extant theory.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter will discuss the findings of this study in answering the research question: *“how do university counsellors understand and experience working therapeutically with procrastination as a presenting problem”*? The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) that has been conducted on ten university counsellors’ accounts highlights three main findings. Firstly, procrastination is identified as a heterogeneous phenomenon evidenced in the three distinct styles illustrated, as experienced by these university counsellors. Secondly, it is therapeutically addressed by varied approaches that are sensitive to the presenting style facilitated by an integrated therapeutic approach. Thirdly, the general challenges of counselling in a university context seem to influence the therapeutic process, in terms of identified examples of constraints.

This chapter will also discuss the wider implications of these findings as there are a number of noteworthy contributions considered concerning the extant psychological and therapeutic literatures and counselling psychology (CoP). Furthermore, the use of IPA will be evaluated in relation to rigour and validity (J. A. Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000) identified in Chapter Three and my reflexivity as the researcher will also be considered. Finally, suggestions for future research and overall conclusions of the contribution of this research will be given.

5.2 Key Findings in relation to the Extant Literature

5.2.1 A dimensional understanding of procrastination as distinct “styles”

The findings from this study offer a different way of viewing procrastination, in terms of distinct “styles”. To some extent, this understanding is consonant with previous qualitative research, such as Grunchel et al. (2012) or Patrzek et al. (2012), who highlight the complexity and multi-layered presentations of procrastination. By contrast, this present study, from a therapeutic perspective, highlights styles as distinct ways of procrastinating in relation to particular emotional and cognitive reported experiences

For example, the de-skilled style echoes some of the psychological research and behaviourist perspectives that broadly construct procrastination as failure to implement the required skills for appropriate and well-timed task completion (see Chapter Two: 2.2 and 2.3). For example, participants highlight that some students procrastinate when deadlines are distal and distracting temptations are more imminent (Steel, 2007; Tice & Baumeister, 1997). Thus, this style is attributed to a distinct skills-deficit for time management or organisation, as reported by these participants.

In the second anxious/fearful style, students procrastinated to avoid anxieties evoked by fears related to the academic task or its outcomes. This style is similar to some of the ways in which therapeutic literatures, such as Ellis and Knaus (1977) or Rorer (1983), have conceptualised procrastination (see Chapter Two: 2.4 and 2.5). For instance, students’ negative task-appraisals are associated with low frustration tolerance (LFT) by Ellis and Knaus’s (1977) and fear of failure or success by Rorer (1983).

However, the notion of style presented in this research, as reported by these participants, focuses more on what is important therapeutically in this academic setting.

The final identified style relates to participants' understanding of their students' internal conflict, which renders their academic experience particularly difficult. Aspects of this conflictual style relate to psychodynamic ideas such as Fenichel (1945) who constructs procrastination as a rebellious act against externally imposed demands. Additionally, the influences of absolute and dogmatic thinking in the self-punitive dynamic of this style seem similar to Ellis and Knaus's (1977) understanding of procrastination that is addressed with REBT. The overall contribution of this notion of style may highlight that drawing on an integrative therapeutic approach enables flexibility and sensitivity to the nuances of the presenting procrastination.

5.2.2 Implementing Varied Therapeutic Approaches

The second key finding of this research identifies bespoke therapeutic approaches that seem helpful when counselling the distinct presenting styles. For example, the deskilled style requires a different approach to the conflictual style. Further to varied interventions, a relational dynamic seems either implicit or explicit in participants' therapeutic work. To illustrate, for instance, interventions with deskilled presentations seemed informed by a more didactic approach to skills building (e.g. Rozental & Carlbring, 2014; Steel, 2007), enabled by a collaborative counsellor-student relationship.

When counselling anxious/fearful procrastination, participants' report drawing on strategies that seemed similar to REBT (e.g. Dryden & Sabelus, 2010; Ellis & Knaus,

1977), for instance, as the counsellors focus on breaking down clients' experience to unveil, and target, the concealed cognitions that underpin this style. By contrast to the somewhat structured ABC model that has been outlined in the REBT literature (Dryden, 2012), these participants' techniques seem less prescriptive. From this therapeutic interaction, participants report that students are enabled to reframe their fearful experience and develop stories of hope and capacity, in a way that seems broadly similar to narrative approaches to counselling procrastination (O'Callaghan, 2004). While the integrative stance of these practitioners is noteworthy, their experiences seem to concur with Rorer (1983) who highlights that real-life practices often travel across modalities in a way that has not been rationalised in theory. Also, their approaches with this style seemed somewhat relationally influenced, similar to Schuman (1981) longer-term case study that highlights the value in the therapist *being* with the procrastinating client, as opposed to offering distinct strategies, which subsequently enables them to work through the anxiety. These studies further endorse the findings of this research that varied approaches are required for different presentations of procrastination.

By contrast to the above implicitly relational approaches, when counselling conflictual styles, participants report a more explicit use of relational dynamics. This seems evident in participants' humanistic emphasis that values empathy and the therapeutic relationship (e.g. Rogers, 1957). This makes an interesting contribution to the extant literature that, to-date, has placed minimal focus on the value of the therapeutic relationship when counselling procrastination. The significance of the therapeutic relationship in this context seems important. Particularly as recent trends indicate the increasing popularity of offering online intervention programmes as a cost-effective means of treatment provision for procrastinating (e.g. Rozental et al. 2015; 2014;

Rozental & Carlbring, 2013). While such studies have not yet found effective treatment outcome data, these participants' accounts seem to make an important contribution to this literature by both implicitly and explicitly emphasising the values of the therapeutic relationship when counselling students who procrastinate.

5.2.3 Implicit and explicit contextual pressures

This key finding relates to the particular demands and pressures reported by these university counsellors when reflecting on their experiences of counselling procrastination (Master Theme 1). This finding reflects the ethical dilemmas identified in previous research that has highlighted the tensions and pressures of working in student counselling services (e.g. Hallett, 2012; Hewitt & Wheeler, 2004; Randall & Bewick, 2015). Interestingly, as reported by the participants, these pressures seemed to bleed into their work across the different styles.

In the deskilled style, for example, these counsellors adopt an almost non-therapeutic language to convey their experiences of the individual students' needs. At times, there was a sense that counsellors closely adhered to the institution's requirements and aligned their role to its educative mission as they worked with the goal to nudge the halting student back to timeliness and productivity. It was as if they managed these institutional expectations by providing counselling as a means of getting students through the system. This resembles Schouwenburg's (2004a) suggestion, which highlights that university counsellors often adopt behaviourally focused approaches due to the demands and constraints of this context.

The implicit pressures of this context, at times, appear to make it particularly challenging for counsellors to engage some students. The findings of this study highlight that the conflictual procrastination style seems particularly prone to resisting therapeutic input. This could also be understood in the context of this setting's performance oriented and priority values. Perhaps the participants' active attempts to engage students sent implicit messages about what they 'ought' to do. Thus, given the rebellious dynamic of this conflictual style, and their aversion to adhering to external requirements, it is as if some students respond to their therapy as they do to the dogmatic demands of this setting. This notion seems consonant with Rorer's (1983) contention about therapists' performance-oriented bias that risks colluding with some clients (see Chapter Two: 2.5). Indeed, when students remain unresponsive, participants have conveyed a range of affective responses such as feeling "sadness", "anger", "frustration" or like "shit". It seems as if these emotional experiences are a reaction to a failed attempt to comply with the overarching performance-pressures implied in these counsellors' work.

5.3 Contributions of This Research

5.3.1 Possible contributions to Counselling Psychology

The phenomenological nature of this research inquiry has offered insights to university counsellors' experiential understanding and approaches to working with procrastination. Their reported lived experience seemed to have three predominant implications of relevance to CoP theory and practice.

Firstly, these findings are particularly relevant to CoP, given that many counselling psychologists work in academic counselling services, and many counselling

psychologists work integratively. The implications of these findings highlight that understanding procrastination as heterogeneous have facilitated these participants to travel across therapeutic approaches in a way that seems to be enabled by an integrative stance. Counselling psychologists' capacity to draw on multiple strands of knowledge and resources (see Chapter One) may be particularly well placed for appropriately working with the different styles, as required.

Secondly, also for counselling psychologists to consider, these findings illustrate participants' diverse use of the therapeutic relationship. Overall, they have variously conveyed the importance of a person-centred ethos, such as striving to enhance clients' sense of agency and power (e.g. Rogers, 1957). Perhaps these counsellors have been drawn to a relationally underpinned humanistic approach as the contextual pressures expect students to engage in autonomous learning and some students may not have learned how to do that. For example, counsellors may play a particularly valuable role in facilitating students' growth and capacity to master their difficulties, thus, highlighting the value of collaborative skills-focused work.

Similarly, when entering university, students may be stepping out of strong relational bonds with parents or teachers (Macaskill, 2012) This potential separation from significant others' wishes in relation to making their own decisions and life choices seem to make the university experience quite unique. Thus, the styles identified in these findings may also reflect the consequences inherent in the potential life changes that come about when individuals go to university. Hence, further highlighting the importance of meeting the students in the context of the therapeutic relationship.

Thirdly, and finally, counselling psychologists utilise different pieces of knowledge to inform their professional practice (Douglas et al., 2016; Milton, 2010). Given this professional openness, counselling psychologists may be a particularly appropriate group to address procrastination in both research and practice. To offer a nuanced therapeutic perspective on procrastination, this CoP research has drawn on multiple strands of knowledge and resources, including quantitative and qualitative psychological research as well as clinically informed sources from therapeutic literatures. The findings from this study have thus contributed to the CoP literature by offering a unique perspective for understanding and counselling procrastination as a presenting problem.

5.3.2 Implications for counselling services in higher education

The contributions of this thesis have highlighted some of the contextual pressures (as noted above) experienced by these participants. These pressures have previously been noted in qualitative research that has explored counsellors' overall experiences of working in HE (e.g. Hewitt & Wheeler, 2004; Randall & Bewick, 2015). While previous findings have highlighted that these pressures may create stressful and/or ethically demanding situations for HE counsellors, those studies have not investigated how these contextual pressures may specifically impact on university counsellors' practices. The findings from this thesis thus contribute to this literature by illustrating some of the contextual influences on university counsellors' work when counselling procrastination, such as pressures to work short-term and fulfil the institutional requirements in enabling students to be more timely and productive.

Secondly, this IPA has indicated that procrastination as a presenting problem in academia is a heterogeneous phenomenon (as noted above). This may have implications for the induction of university counsellors as an awareness of these different styles could enable novice practitioners to effectively approach and help students despite the potential constraints of a brief model. This contribution could be particularly significant, as Schouwenburg (2004a) has highlighted that university counsellors commonly implement behavioural approaches merely due to the constraints of short-term contracts, including those who endorse non-behavioural perspectives of understanding and counselling procrastination. For instance, if a counsellor recognises a student's anxious/fearful style, this may enable them to promptly address students' unhelpful appraisals, as opposed to adopting purely behavioural approaches that do not attend to these underlying fears.

Thirdly, while no pre-counselling assessment tool for procrastination has yet been produced (see recommendations for future research below), in the meantime, it may be recommended that counsellors explore these students' perceptions and expectations of academic counselling. Openly addressing this from the onset of therapy may help university counsellors to both establish whether students' expectations are realistic and gauging their therapeutic readiness or insightfulness, which may guide their therapeutic approach.

5.4 Critical Evaluation of This Research

5.4.1 Methodological considerations and suggestions for future research

An IPA methodology has been chosen for its appropriateness to the research aims in providing rich and detailed insight into the subjective understandings and experiences of university counsellors' therapeutic work with procrastination. To reiterate, the idiographic nature of IPA (J. A. Smith et al., 2009) infers that these findings are reflective of a specific group of people in a certain context, which limits its generalisability. In other words, while others practitioners may share similar experiences these findings represent the experiences of these ten university counsellors who have been considered sufficiently homogenous to be selected to participate: all identifying as integrative university counsellors with experience of counselling procrastination and all working in the south of the UK (see Table 1 in Chapter Three: 3.4.3). Nevertheless, it is hoped that these findings still contribute to enhancing understanding of some of the therapeutic processes with this particular client group. Furthermore, a potential application of these findings for academic counselling in the UK may be useful as this study has recruited practitioners from different universities, with different seniorities, who are employed on both full- and part-time bases and with a 2:3 ratio of male and female participants (again, see Table 1).

This research could be limited for its inclusion of non-counselling psychologists from a variety of training backgrounds. This eclectic sample possibly compromised both the homogeneity of the participants and their relevance to CoP. However, different educational backgrounds or training routes can lead to a qualification in CoP (Douglas et al. 2006), and the responsibilities for counselling psychologists to undertake continuous professional development (BPS, 2005) may imply that a group of

counselling psychologists, concerning their training, is similarly diverse. In fact, the implicit and explicit relational influences on these participants' work seem particularly relevant to CoP (see above), which may also make recommendations for future research to recruit counselling psychologists and explore their understanding and experiences of the therapeutic relationship when counselling procrastination in HE.

The subjective nature of an IPA study is further implied in its hermeneutic process (J. A. Smith et al., 2009) which infers that the results solely offer one reading of several possible interpretations. The triple hermeneutic nature of this study (i.e. the researcher's interpretation of the participant's meaning-making of their student client's presentation) may infer that parts of the data are not as robust as it could be if it pertained directly to the students' experiences. However, the knowledgeable quality of participants' accounts including their involvement with procrastination over time (Patrzek et al. 2012) seems to have enabled them to draw on a wealth of experiences and case examples to convey their insights on the therapeutic processes with this presenting problem. Arguably, more so than the procrastinating student who attends a brief course of counselling for their problem.

Finally, despite the research aim to explore the experiences of therapy with procrastinating student clients, some participants may have had concerns that the research, in some way, was evaluating their skills as a practitioner. While this may have influenced their selection of data to present and reflect on, given the inclusion of some of the challenges faced in their work (Master Theme 1 and subtheme 4.4.4), arguably, it might be suggested that this was not the case.

Further to the brief suggestions for future research (see above), some additional recommendations are made here. For instance, building on the idea of procrastination styles, this notion can be used as a rationale in working towards a comprehensive pre-counselling assessment tool for identifying procrastinating student clients. Such assessment could potentially help the effective treatment of individual styles within the remit of a brief therapeutic model. Similarly, it could also guide employers for HE counselling services to recruit practitioners with the appropriate expertise and skillset as required by each style identified in this research.

5.4.2 Review of researchers reflexivity

IPA highlights that the researcher inevitably sees and interprets the participants' world through a personal lens, thus highlighting the role of researcher's reflexivity (Smith et al., 2009). Research supervision, reflexivity and personal therapy have been essential in uncovering my assumptions and influences, while occasionally challenging these to reduce their effect on the research process. This enabled me to gradually move from a position of "procrastinating student in need" to a more open flexible stance of "curious researcher". To maintain continuous openness and sensitivity to the influences of my own process of the research, I kept reflexive notes throughout. This facilitated an expression of personal feelings and thoughts at different stages in the process. I consider this to have enabled me to remain sensitive to the participants' experiences and prevented my own assumptions and experiences from dominating.

Additionally, the critical realist stance of this research has highlighted the heterogeneity of procrastination, which starkly contrasts my initial curiosity to conceptually pin down "what procrastination is" and how to overcome it. Conducting this study has taught me

a lot about procrastination and most significantly, perhaps, is the finding that procrastination is not this “one thing”, its behavioural manifestation may be similar, albeit its underlying reasons are far more difficult to generalise.

My developing identity as a counselling psychologist undoubtedly influenced me throughout the research process, and I think I felt it most keenly whilst conducting the interviews. I was then very aware of trying to “shut off” the part of me that was actively seeking a neat solution. At first, I found myself comparing the participants’ accounts to how they could be applied to my own studying practices, perhaps in an attempt to understand more fully my own experience of being a procrastinator. From my first awareness of over-identification, I have sought to bracket it off and attempted to respond to participants’ accounts with equal curiosity.

By understanding more of the complexity of procrastination now, including the nuances of it and its therapeutic demands, I have learned that it is not easily solved and, for me, it is about living creatively with these styles rather than eradicating them. Gaining this insight enabled me to know myself and manage myself better, in a ways that enabled me to produce this one reading as an understanding relevant to counselling psychologists’ clinical experience.

5.5 Final Conclusion

This research has offered new insights into counsellors’ experiences of working therapeutically with procrastination as a presenting problem in academic counselling settings. The use of IPA has facilitated the development of a rich account of participants’ experiences that otherwise would have been missed with a quantitative

research approach, which still dominates this field. The findings are consistent with some of the extant research into the antecedents and perpetuating factors of delaying behaviour, as offered by different psychological and therapeutic literatures. The key findings of this research indicate the active, engaged, and relational manner in which these counsellors work with this clients group; as well as the contextual challenges they face.

These participants work hard to counter-act the expectations imposed by the context through overt and covert reports on developing a therapeutic relationship in facilitating change. Considering these issues may be helpful to support counsellors who work therapeutically with procrastination presentations as well as guiding further research in this field. As a final conclusion, this IPA has made a contribution by highlighting the value of an integrative and relational approach to researching and counselling procrastination.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference PSYC 13/096 in the Department of Psychology and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 13th November 2013.

University of Roehampton Ethical Approval

Dear Shirin,

Ethics Application

Applicant: Shirin Shams

Title: Practitioners' experiences of Working with Procrastination in Academic Counselling Settings: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Reference: PSYC 13/ 096

Department: Psychology

Many thanks for your response and the amended documents. I am pleased to confirm that all conditions for approval of this project have now been met. We do not require anything further in relation to this application.

Please advise us if there are any changes to the research during the life of the project. Minor changes can be advised using the Minor Amendments Form on the Ethics Website, but substantial changes may require a new application to be submitted.

Many thanks,

Jan

Jan Harrison

Ethics Officer - Research & Business Development Office
University of Roehampton | Froebel College | Roehampton Lane | London | SW15 5PJ

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Participant Code:

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Title: Practitioners' Experiences of Working with Procrastination in Academic Counselling Settings: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project. This information sheet provides details regarding the research project to help you understand the reasons why it is being conducted so that you may be able to make an informed decision about whether you would like to take part or not. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

What is the purpose of the study?

My name is Shirin Shams and I am a third year Counselling Psychologist in training at the University of Roehampton. I am conducting this study for my Doctoral research project. I would like to recruit ten practitioners who work in academic counselling settings, from various therapeutic orientations, who are willing to take part in this study and share their experiences in regards to counselling with this client group.

Procrastination is a common problem, particularly among students, and it is argued to have numerous negative implications on the individual and their mental health. Research has emphasised the occurrence of procrastination by stating that the phenomenon is on the rise, and that most university counsellors come across procrastination as a presenting problem in their work. Although procrastination has been widely researched, particularly in relation to its causes and effects, counselling with procrastinating clients is less investigated. Treatment texts are available, however no in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of counselling the procrastinating clients has yet been conducted and this is the purpose of this study. Your participation in this study contributes to strengthening the understanding of counselling with this client group and may provide useful insights into the therapeutic process of counselling the procrastinating client.

Who can take part?

If you are a practitioner working in an academic counselling setting, and you have experience providing counselling to students who have presented with procrastination problems you are eligible to participate.

What will happen if I decide to participate?

We will meet at the University of Roehampton or a location that is convenient and safe for you. You will be given the opportunity to ask any questions prior to the interview

and then you will be given a consent form to sign. The interview would be audio-recorded and would last around 60 to 90 minutes. I will ask to hear about your experiences of providing counselling to clients who have presented with procrastination issues in the academic counselling setting.

I am interested in hearing about what went well and what could have been better. I might use some of your quotes in the study results; all of which would be anonymised

Do I have to take part?

The decision to participate is entirely yours. If you decide to participate, you will be given the opportunity to ask questions prior to the interview and then you will be given a consent form to sign. If you take part, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. If you decide to take part in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by contacting the researcher, Shirin Shams, or the Director of Studies using your unique participant code provided on the documents you are given. The code will help the researcher identify and destroy all information and data related to you. There will be no penalty for withdrawing your participation from the project.

Will information about me be kept confidential?

Everything you tell me will be strictly confidential. Results from the study will not include your name or any information that could let anyone know it was you who took part. All the information will be stored safely on password protected external drive or filed into a locked cabinet and only the research team will be able to see it. Participants are asked to anonymise all clients and case examples that may be referred to in the interview, in the interest of confidentiality.

What will happen to the results of the study?

- I will use the results to provide an exploration of useful insights into counselling this client group and make an important contribution to the Counselling Psychology literature.
- I will share the results with organisations that provide counselling for procrastinating clients
- The results may be published in scientific journals and talks given at scientific conferences.

Who has reviewed the study?

Before any research goes ahead it has to be checked by a Research Ethics Committee. They make sure that the research is fair. This study has been reviewed by the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee.

Thank you for reading this sheet. If you have any questions, or would like to take part in the study, please contact:

Shirin Shams - researcher
Email: shamss@roehampton.ac.uk



Participant Code:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Title: Practitioners' Experiences of Working with Procrastination in Academic Counselling Settings: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Brief Description of Research Project:

Procrastination is common and in particular among students. Extensive empirical research has been conducted to investigate this phenomenon which is argued to be on the rise. The present study aims at gaining further knowledge about counselling with procrastinating clients via interviewing practitioners from academic counselling settings, in order to explore their experiences of counselling with this client group.

To pursue this project, audio-recorded interviews will be conducted using around 10 participants and lasting about 60 to 90 minutes; during the interviews participants' experiences of counselling clients presenting with procrastination issues will be explored. Interviews will take place in an interview room at the University of Roehampton or a location that is convenient and safe for the participant (such as their office or home, for example). Interviews will be transcribed and analysed; participants are offered a copy of their transcripts upon request.

All information gathered will be held strictly confidential and all identifiable data will be coded. Confidentiality may be breached if any information is disclosed during interview that concerns participants' safety or the safety of others. Participants are asked to ensure that clients and case examples which may be referred to in the interview are made anonymous.

As a participant, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons. In order to withdraw you can contact the researcher, Shirin Shams or

her Director of Studies with your unique participant code which can be found on all the paperwork you have been given. This will allow for all information and data related you to be identified and securely destroyed. If you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

Finally, participants may be asked to be contacted again if necessary, via email, in order to collect further data to support the research.

Investigator Contact Details:

Shirin Shams
University of Roehampton
Department of Psychology
Whitelands College
London SW15 4JD
shamss@roehampton.ac.uk

To be completed by the participant (Please initial each box):

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2. I understand that I am free to decline my participation of the study and I am able to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.	
3. I consent to the audio recording of my interview	
4. I understand that authorised persons will look at relevant sections of the data collected by this research from the University of Roehampton. Representatives from academic and professional assessment bodies may also look at anonymised sections of the data collected in order to assess the quality of this doctoral research project. All will have a duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant.	
5. I agree that my anonymised quotes from my interview may be used in any publications.	
6. I agree to take part in the above study.	

Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

Name

Signature

Date

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies).

Director of Studies Contact Details:

Dr Gina Pauli
Department of Psychology
University of Roehampton
Whitelands College
London SW15 4JD
R.Pauli @roehampton.ac.uk
020 8392 3545

Head of Department Contact Details:

Dr. Diane Bray
Department of Psychology
University of Roehampton
Whitelands College
London SW15 4JD
D.bray@roehampton.ac.uk
020 8392 3627



Participant Code:

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF FORM

Research Title: Practitioners' Experiences of Working with Procrastination in Academic Counselling Settings: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Thank you for taking part in the present study as a research participant concerning your experiences of counselling with students who present with procrastination issues. Procrastination is incredibly common, particularly among students and within academic counselling settings. Research indicates that the dilatory behaviour has numerous detrimental effects on student's mental health; although causes and effects of procrastination have been widely studied, counselling aspects of this phenomenon are less researched and this has motivated the present research. This is considered particularly important as research has stated that most university counsellors will come across procrastinating clients in their work. Your participation in this study contributes to strengthening the understanding of counselling procrastinating clients and plays an important part in providing insight to the treatment process of this phenomenon.

Each interview will be transcribed for analysis, and a copy of this is offered to you upon request. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and all identifiable information will be coded. Your anonymity as a participant is therefore assured in the writing up of this thesis as well as in any its future publications. If you wish to withdraw from this study at any time, please contact the researcher and quote your participant code on this form. This will enable your participation to be identified and your data securely removed from the research.

This project has been approved under the procedures of University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee. If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in

this study, you can contact the investigator, at shamss@roehampton.ac.uk, or the Director of Studies for the project, Dr Gina Pauli at R.pauli@roehampton.ac.uk or 020 8392 3545.

Your participation in this study has been highly appreciated and very valuable in the field of Procrastination and Counselling Psychology. Please note that you may be contacted again, via email, for further data collection in support of this study; however this would only occur with your advance permission of course. If you would like to receive a copy of the findings of the research please provide an email address and I shall send them to you in due time. Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the head of department (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Investigator Contact Details:

Shirin Shams
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APPENDIX 5

Dear – name of head of counselling,

Exploring academic procrastination.

My name is Shirin Shams, and I am a trainee on the PsychD Counselling Psychology programme at the University of Roehampton. I am emailing you to enquire if any of the counsellors who work in your service would be interested in taking part in my research. My research is concerned with qualified university counsellors' views and experiences of working with student s who seek counselling presenting with procrastination issues.

The areas that I would cover in interviews are as follows:

- Their understanding of procrastination, based on their experience
- Their ways of working with procrastination
- How therapeutic change tends to come about for these students
- How counsellors think these issues are best managed within university counselling services

I look forward to hearing from you or your colleagues who would be interested in taking part in this research.

Best wishes,

Shirin

APPENDIX 6

Interview Schedule

Please could you start by telling me about how you came to work in this counselling service?

Tell me about how it is to work with clients who procrastinate?

- *What happens when a procrastinating client comes to you for help?*
- *Can you give me an example?*
- *Imagine you would advise a colleague who is new to this work; what would you say?*

Based on your experience, what is your understanding of procrastination?

- *What do you pay particular attention to?*

How would you describe your approach with this client group?

- *What are useful models and techniques?*
- *Can you give me an example?*

How, if in any way, does the work with procrastination compare to your experience of working with other clients?

Can you tell me what enables these students to change?

- *What factors influence this?*
- *How do these students **tend to respond** to counselling?*
- *What do you find being effective in your interventions/therapy with these students?*
- *Less effective interventions/ ways of working with these students?*

What feeling is aroused in you when a procrastinating client comes to you for help?

- *Do you have a particular emotional response to these clients?*
- *How do you manage these feelings (in the session)?*

How do procrastinating clients respond to you?

How do you think working with procrastination in a university setting is best managed?

- *Facilitated with Groups; individual counselling etc.*

How does the counselling generally come to an end?

By the end of therapy, how do you know if it has been successful?

By the end of therapy, how so you know if it has been unsuccessful?

Has anything come up in this interview that you hadn't thought about before?

Is anything else you think is important for me to know (that I haven't asked about)

- *Important event or anything else that haven't been addressed*

APPENDIX 7

Emerging themes	Line no's	Original Transcript with participant ID	Interpretation-codes
higher ed. student	1-10	<p>I: Maybe we can start by you can start by telling me how you came to work in this service first of all?</p> <p>P: Ok, so I trained as a clinical psychologist and I qualified in 2007 and then worked in the NHS for five years and then had enough or wanted a change and then applied for this job here and it's a great change yea quite different with a university population erm (int-oh) and I also work two days privately. But I don't know you want me to focus on students is that right?</p> <p>I: Yes</p> <p>P: Yep. Ok.</p> <p>I: Now thinking about procrastination, can you tell me about how it is to work those clients?</p>	<p>wanted to move from a less impact on me? (if fed up) (me: been in NHS environment and can relate, immerse pressures & demands from management as well as clients successful work environment, I think) I can imagine academic environment is much 'calmer'.</p>
Therapist's perception of work	11-28	<p>I: Mm erm... I think it depends on an erm sort of the reason for the procrastination actually, I do not think I can say it is very easy of very hard obviously it is a bit more complicated than that depending on the individual client erm so if someone has very little motivation or something so they are not getting anything done erm if that is the reason for the procrastination and they see no reason to do things that to me is harder (int-yes) than someone who is disorganised.</p> <p>I: Yep. Ok</p> <p>P: Or something like that mm. I generally don't find it very easy (int-ye), I don't know if it is because I am a fairly organised person myself (int-mm) you kind of think 'just do it' or 'just do it'?</p>	<p>depends on reason for P. emphasises & complicated why is it obvious?</p> <p>ambiguity about why one would P?</p> <p>lack of motivation harder to work with than disorganisation</p> <p>I'm sensing ambiguity here - is there a difference between maybe different in emotional & practical procrastination (emotional being disorganised & practical easy to work with) emotional being disorganised & practical easy to work with emotional being disorganised & practical easy to work with emotional being disorganised & practical easy to work with</p> <p>blunt change in statement (from it depends to generally not easy) Not easy, possibly due to own organisation</p> <p>laying due to (embarrassing) self-disclosure & sense of light humouring or indication of inexperience?</p>
Procrastination	29-31		

descriptive comments
linguistic comments
conceptual comments
emerging themes

to change as separate
have person to my
perspective.

1	laughed freely	[laughs lightly] you know (int-mm) but I think it depends on the function. It's basically avoidance isn't it so what are they avoiding? → <u>craving</u> this is <u>response of something</u> ?	asking me. (might have been useful for me to reflect this back to her and her answer)
2	P: as overdone		It is <u>avoidance</u>
3	textually		for it's away of our being and <u>potential</u> its impact
4			ON the whole - for asking me may be with purpose
5	impersonal in		to establish some rapport but also raising a question
6	continuing		the many ask in her work too.
7	source of P		
8		P: I don't think two, there are <u>probably</u> lots	indicating
9			lots of reasons
10		I: OK	
11			Sometimes there are quite a practical
12	P: But I just sort of gave two, because with <u>disorganised</u>	<u>easier to fix?</u>	explains solution. I seems strategic forward.
13	people it might be easier because you can just give them an		some reasons early. (P: yes and)
14	activity schedule and er plan their day and things like that		give them a solution. As there is aim of ways to do)
15	→ P: <u>reactive</u>		
16	I: Yea		
17			speech slows down, less continue talking about this.
18	P: Whereas someone has very little reason to get up or do	<u>really</u>	Why was someone interrupted? What are they?
19	anything (int-yes) then they see no point in life (int-ye) then		un-motivated? how is this with
20	they are - there is a bigger issue - i.e. <u>depression?</u>		However, when someone is feeling generally
21			down, is this harder because it challenges a
22	I: Mmm, and could you tell me a bit more about that - you		the practical or shifts up feelings of
23	know could you give me an example of how you understand		unexplained helplessness / hopelessness.
24	that, what you do with that? - see many questions.		
25			seems like much deeper, reflective & existential
26	P: So... I suppose with that you would be erm <u>getting them to</u>		work. She view it as being a <u>clueless</u> (int-yes)
27	<u>think about what their life is like and whether they want to</u>		get clients to think and identify it was is what they
28	<u>continue in this way (int-yes) erm long term and get them to</u>		went to do - <u>does experiments to help lift their mood</u>
29	<u>do behavioural experiment I suppose with the procrastination</u>		<u>specifies speed up when talk about feelings</u>
30	'how does it feel if you do get one thing done (int-um) erm		how would one get quiet to participate if they
31	and does that lift your mood at all?' erm (int-um) I think there is		more like motivation.
32	also the perfectionists who are so afraid of failing they'll put		perfectionists? due to fear of failing, they're motivated
33	something off but with them at least given that they want to		And this and P: yes with

1	do well in the long term there is some motivation (int-yes) to get things done so I find that easier to work with than the more depressed de-motivated (int-yes) type of people (int-yes) so that would be another people who'd procrastinate I think	Her speed of speech indicated to me that there is something about energy & excitement related to the client and their perception of the work.
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7	I: Mm and you mentioned something about wanting to continue this way, what did you mean by that?	identified perfectionists & groups/types of people who procrastinate
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10	P: Whether they want to - well they know what it is like if they are just sitting around doing nothing all day and procrastinating everything erm given that they are coming to therapy 'is it working for you (this this lifestyle of avoidance and lack of activity?' (int-mm) so it's not about me telling them what to do (int-yes) but given that they are coming here there seems to be a problem (int-um) is sort of that that kind of more pragmatic thing (int-yes) ok you find it hard to do things but not doing things (int-mm) how are you finding that sort of thing	I am trying to explore the belief and P learning an active client for me: I felt anxious, somewhat) procrastinating? state of emergency? seems straightforward lifestyle → generalising! seems simplistic? evokes that interrogating clients avoidant way to activate behaviour for doing. pragmatically questioning usefulness of P - not telling clients what to do. sort of 'uhh' seems hard to describe what is done? challenge questioning clients through questioning their behaviour?
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21	I: I see, and you mentioned behavioural experiment and that leads me to assume that you work in a CBT way;	
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24	P: Yes	
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26	I: Do you work that way with all procrastinating clients?	
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28	P: Ye, I'm basically a CBT person or a bit third wave, mindfulness, ACT, motion focused therapy (int-mm) ye	essence of practice. CBT person and additional components
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32	I: And you mentioned also that these kind of techniques that are used in CBT may be used with the one's that are perfectionistic or are procrastinating with on a specific task	
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APPENDIX 8

Emerging Themes	Page/line	Key words
Challenging to work with stuckness	1. 29-31	You kind of think 'just do it'
identifying what lies behind the P	2. 2-3	It's avoidance, so what are they avoiding
disorganised P may have direct solution	2. 12-14	Just give them an activity schedule
Some cases are more serious	2. 18-20	Then there is a bigger issue
Deep, reflective & existential approach	2.26-28	Get them think about what their life is like
Prefer/ easier with anxiety/energetic P	3.1-5	There is ... motivation to get things done
Identify volition to enable help	3.10-19	Whether they want to...
Utility in approach, between doing and avoiding	4.11-16	See how it has gone...see difference it has made...intervention that you can just see...
Change from relational meeting	5.1-5	Someone else is there with you
Facing P can come to be unpleasant	6.30-33	Bite the bullet...particular trigger
Time pressure & quick pacing in therapy doesn't work for all	6.9-14	No endless sessions...some slower pace...some extremely speed
Different reasons for P	6.16	For whatever reason
Counsellor to manage their expectations	6.22; 28-31	Not the most rewarding or dramatic/snappy results for everyone
When P deep-rooted/developmental, brief therapy may be insufficient	7.3-13	how someone developed...understand why someone might not change in three weeks
Different emotional underlying causes	8.16-20	Links to both depression...and anxiety
Comfort in P /manage client's anxiety	9.5-8	Don't feel that comfortable doing the thing
P as fearful task appraisal	9.15	A big piece of work is too scary
Change: Seeing reason and consequences	9.21-31	Recognise negative consequences...get them to understand why they're doing it
Problem account unhelpful/re-name/re-frame it	9.32-33	Call it like a coping strategy rather than something really bad
Short term relief/benefit - neglect leads to long term pain/problem	10.2-4;17-23	Feel a bit worse the next day...problem is still there...
Promote insight when P offers relief	11.21-25;31-33	Understanding the function...relief of not having to do something uncomfortable
Exhausting to work with stuckness	12.27-28	Feel a bit like wading through mud
Preference to work with anxiety driven P	12.31-13.1	My preference...respond more quickly
Challenge their resistance	16. 4	If you're not here you cannot progress
Describing work as trial to therapy	17.24-29	Give taster of what it's like having therapy
P not one 'thing'	19.22-24	I'm finding it hard to generalise
TR varies depending on type of P	19.25-33	TR differs ... demotivated harder than anxious...more energy to change
Change: emphasis on underlying reason	21. 4-5	helpful to pick out...what was behind it
Change is simple /not rocket science	21.18-24	Almost off his own back; not rocket science
frustration with client stuckness	24. 2-4	really slow can feel a little bit frustrating
Use of congruence to help move stuck	24.16-20	'I'm not sure where we go from here tbh'
Chaotic past /Unsettled/un-soothed child	25.15-21	grown up in this slightly chaotic way
Same behaviour but for different reasons	26.11-16	caring not at all or too much about it
Doing approach	26.22-33	The very basic, get them to do stuff